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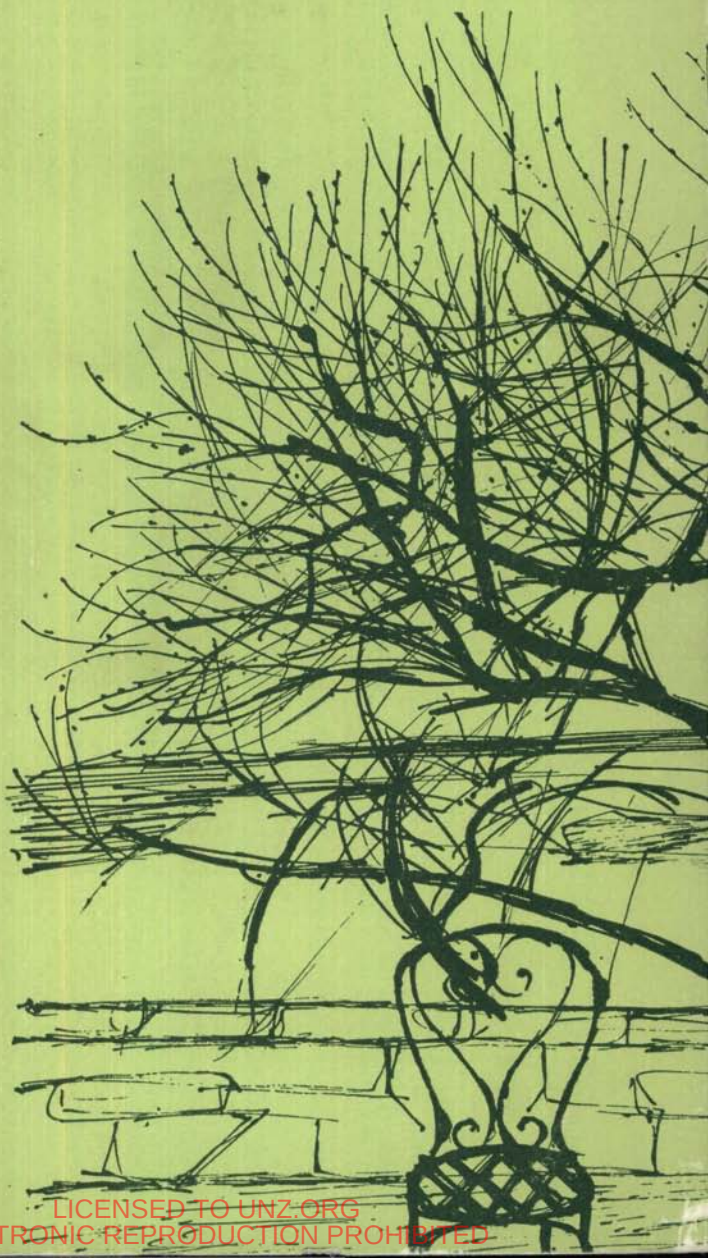

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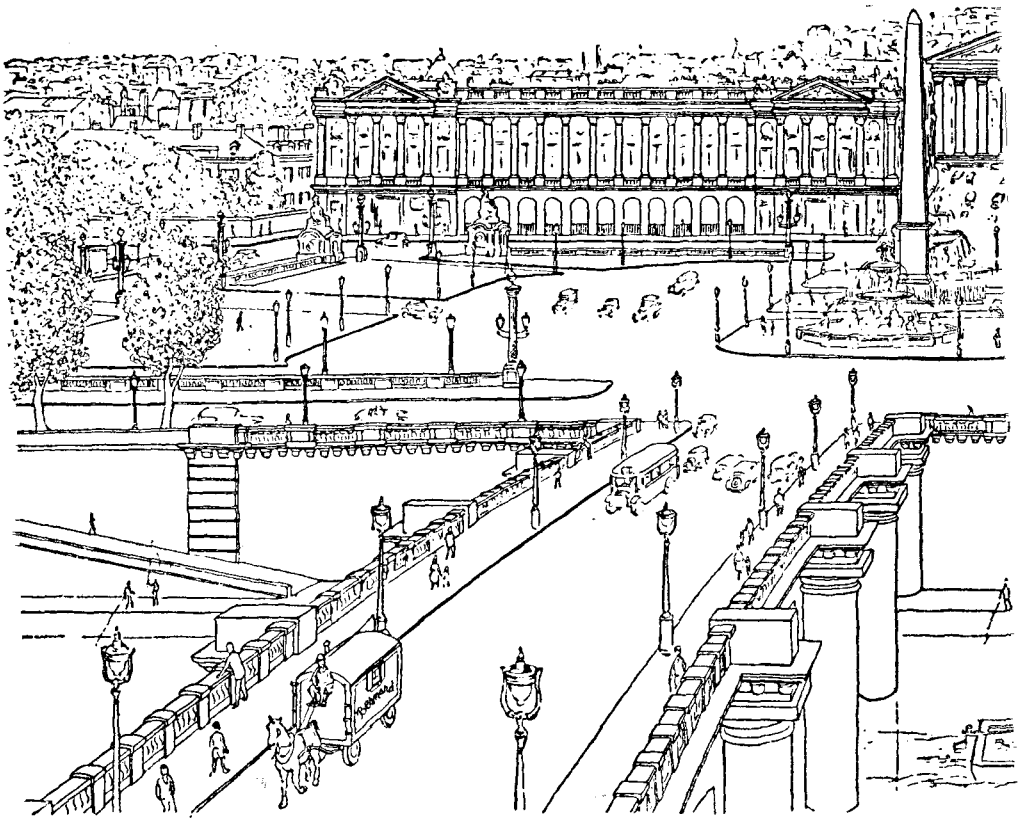

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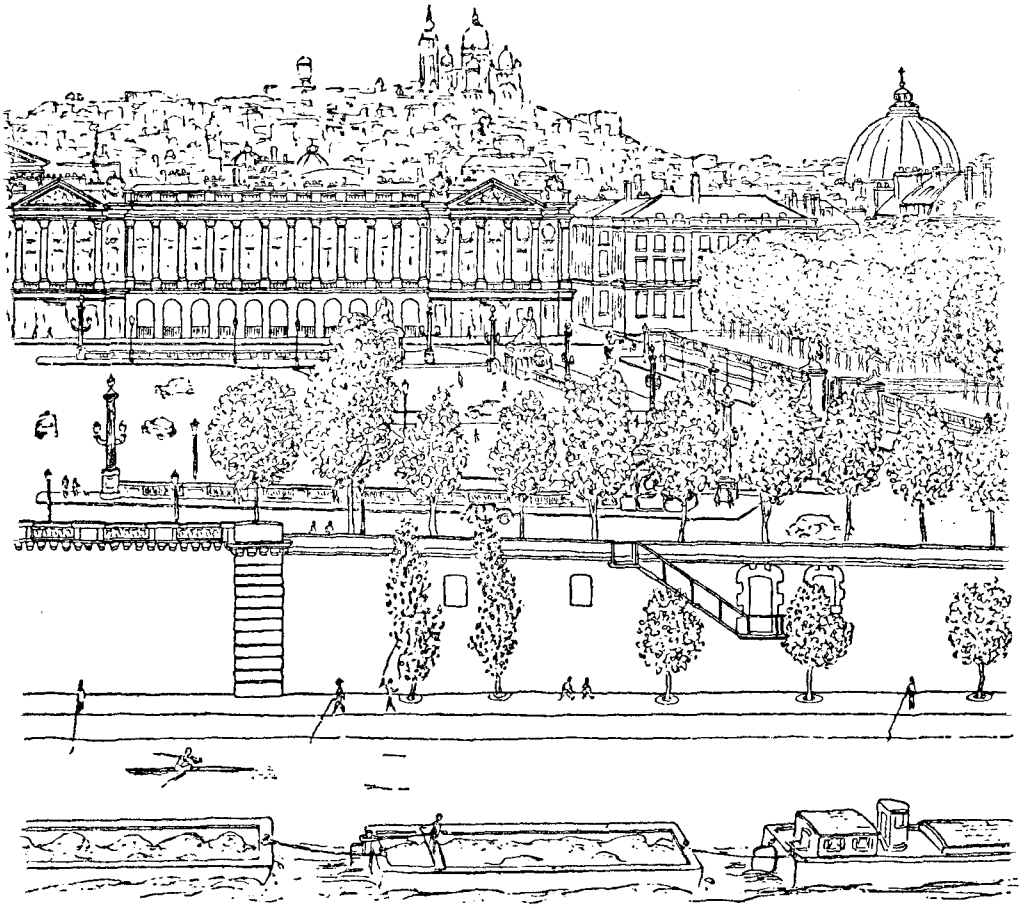

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JOHN PHILLIPS

THE ENGINES OF HYGEIA

AT nine in the morning, when all was fresh, the starched uniforms of the nurses bustled more briskly, their curious caps sat more pertly, and the illusion of sanitation and good cheer bloomed on the fifth floor of the Private Pavilion more brightly than at any hour of the day. Through the high glass doors at either end of the corridor the summer sun poured over the linoleum carpeting. A force of scrub women in apricot-colored dresses, softly chattering in the rapid language of Puerto Ricans, was wetting down the last mote of infectious dust. And the hygienic odors of the great hospital were suffused with the building momentum of nurses, tray-bearing orderlies, and interns, freshly shaven.

Merril stood before the reception desk. Mrs. Dougherty was reading Look Magazine and had not noticed him. A big man with a heavy fretful face neither old nor still identifiably young. He held his thick calves and shoulders of an athlete tense underneath the wrinkle-proof Dacron suit of which he was rather proud.

"Mrs. Dougherty," he began presently. "I want to apologize for what I said last night. I've been on edge lately," and he added, "—in this hot weather," and now Merril judged he'd made his amends, formally enough, without obsequiousness or truckling.

Mrs. Dougherty, the Floor Supervisor, looked up and answered, as though she had been expecting this all morning. "I know you didn't mean it, Mr. Merril," she said.

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Mrs. Dougherty, with whom he'd had the first of his humiliating colloquies the night before, was bestowing a motherly look. Merril knew that no words, nor scarcely any contrite deed, could serve as penance this morning. He felt, for an instant against his harsh better judgment, greatly humbled.

He had made up his mind last night never again to speak to Mrs. Dougherty beyond the perfunctory limits of civility.

Last night, after he laid down the poetry book and started to take his leave of Ellen, he had opened both her windows wide. But the July night hung outside with a moist oppressiveness that refused quite to surrender itself to the catharsis of a thunder shower. Merril cursed inwardly, always inwardly, the antiseptic mediocrity of this room. It faced onto an air shaft and the grated windows of the Men's Ward. When Ellen was brought back to the hospital in June it had been the cheapest available, and yet Merril no longer dared to contemplate its pyramiding expense.

"At least they could get you a fan," he said.

"No."

"You can't expect to sleep this way, Ellen. God."

"No—" She broke off long enough for Merril to hear her swallow and then moisten her lips. "Darling—it's not worth it."

"You have to sleep. You know that, Ellen."

"Darling, don't bother."

"You'll burn up!" He realized that he had raised his voice and that his own mouth was dry, that it was his own brow tingling.

A rubber cord was looped over the bed's headstand, its button dangling by the bed table. Merril reached for it cautiously so as not to interfere with the intravenous feeding tube, not to upset the chromium basin that had been sheltered under a napkin almost two weeks now one foot from Ellen's pillow. But he pressed his thumb defiantly against the button, as though he were willing to break either one or both. He went to the doorway to satisfy himself that the

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light was functioning, a yellowish disc blinking over Ellen's door while a low buzz sounded in the nurses' sitting room two doors down. The sound of a radio came from afar. A shouting voice, then uproarious laughter and the applause of a studio audience. Merril glared down the dim corridor.

"Damn their souls," he said, not quite to himself.

"Hugh, the nurses work so hard."

"*Hard*?"

When, after a minute more, Mrs. Dougherty came by in a street dress, he'd signaled her.

"I'm off duty, Mr. Merril. The night nurse will be with you in two shakes."

"My wife is not comfortable," Merril said. "I want an electric fan in here."

Mrs. Dougherty, the whole competent bulk of her, brushed by him and approached the bed with an infuriating tenderness. "You real hot in here, dear?"

"Not hot." Merril again heard his wife's laborious swallowing. "I'm just a little warm." Ellen spoke so wearily.

Mrs. Dougherty, in her hospital way, was touching sheets and smoothing pillows. She secured the rubber tube to Ellen's vein with a fresh adhesive and glanced at the glass attached to the wall, safely out of Ellen's vision, looking like a vast inverted raindrop, whose dwindling sugary content Merril was reasonably sure, though every nurse denied it, was drugged.

"Say, darned if we're not almost through our supper" Mrs. Dougherty said.

The hygienic crudity of the remark made Merril catch a breath, and he knew how it must have sounded to Ellen.

For—however long ago?—when Neddy was just born... When Neddy was born, Ellen's father made them a present of a fancy trained nurse who was to stay a week or two, until Ellen became accustomed to the feedings. She'd been a fragile but authoritarian woman and for four days she dominated their lives. The fourth night, when she brought Neddy in to Ellen, clucking over the shrewd and wizened face, she cooed without a vestige of sensitivity, "Now Neddy, time to

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eat now. Time to go to your cow." And next morning, Ellen telephoned her father that she wouldn't need a nurse a day longer. She and Neddy were going to have a long association and they didn't want to begin in a state of mutual revulsion.

The episode, the recollection of it, belonged remote and buried like most things associated with the birth of Neddy, with rosy illusions, resolves and fiery beginnings. Their presence was no more fitting in the here and now than small sheltered children.

"Just about ten minutes, and you'll have it all drunk up." Mrs. Dougherty snapped off the ceiling light.

"I'd like to have an electric fan in here," Merril said furiously.

"The night nurse will pop in," Mrs. Dougherty went on, "in case there's anything you'd like. Would you like a nice windy fan, dear?"

"Don't worry about me," Ellen answered faintly. "Please go home now."

"My yes, I'm going home." Mrs. Dougherty snapped off the light by the bed, plunging them into darkness, and said good night to Ellen and started for the door.

"I'd appreciate it if—" Merril started sarcastically, but he was too late.

"Good night, darling," Ellen said, almost a whisper.

"Good night, Ellie," he said, going to the bed. "Sleep tight." His voice quavered, protesting an unnatural imposition of his emotions. "Don't let the bedbugs bite."

Ellen spoke, a real whisper now in the stillness, "She works... very hard. You mustn't scold her, Hugh."

Mechanically, he bent over the pillows, looking for the dark pocket in which he could barely make out her head in a trace of light from the corridor. He'd forgotten that she would have a little smell of lavender.

"Do something pleasant this evening," Ellen whispered. "Don't sit at home alone."

When she unexpectedly turned her head, Merril steeled himself (it was a dreadful thing she asked) and with effort

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kissed her waiting lips and completed for this day his gesture of expiation.

"ETH I DO INDEEDY DOLLY DEAR!"

The full volume of the radio struck Merril at the bedside. A woman shrieked something through her adenoids to which the babytalking voice of the comedian replied to bring on a thunderclap of applause and laughter.

Merril rushed to the corridor and down it like a bull and burst into a lighted room. "Do you know that people here are ill?" he heard himself shouting against the noise, and suddenly there was nothing but his shouting. "*Desperately ill?*"

He was aware of two bony hands frantically grasping at an array of plastic dials. And still it seemed an hour before he recognized that he was bellowing against silence, or that Mrs. Dougherty was beside him, her hand commandingly upon his arm. The culprit hung his shaggy head and tugged at the bedclothing. In his polka dot pajamas, he looked, like Penrod, like the idealized cover of a woman's magazine, or, as he rolled his terrified eyes at Merril, like Neddy.

"It was Red Skelton," the boy said.

"Red Skelton!"

"I have to have my tonsils out tomorrow," the boy said.

Mrs. Dougherty was saying, "Will you just step outside, Mr. Merril?"

"I never worked this kind of radio," said the boy.

"Try and keep it nice and low, honey. It's past eight o'clock."

Mrs. Dougherty brushed past Merril, grazing his arm this time with her great bosom. Merril followed, in instinctive obedience. He followed Mrs. Dougherty dumbly down the corridor, past Ellen, past the reception desk and into the nurses' sitting room, where Mrs. Dougherty turned.

"Mr. Merril, I don't mind saying I'm in charge of this floor."

"It strikes me your supervision leaves much to be desired. I think if Dr. Dagget were to know—"

"You have the right to complain to Dr. Dagget, Mr. Merril."

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Mrs. Dougherty pulled on a black pair of gloves and gathered up two swollen brownpaper bags that he was sure contained soiled foundation garments, facial creams, and unfinished knitting. He had seen a score of Mrs. Doughertys, clutching brownpaper parcels, traveling barren, manless, their faces tired under pancake makeup, valiant, wronged, champions of astrology. They shared their grievances in trolley cars, buzzing like hot summer bees. ("I sez, if that don't beat the band... I sez the *nerve*... and she sez... sez...sez").

"Mrs. Merril isn't the only sick person on the floor," Mrs. Dougherty said.

"In 517?" he demanded. She was about to brush past him, maddeningly, through yet another doorway, and therefore his question came louder and more helpless than he intended. "Well, when is *he* going to die?"

He stared passionately at Mrs. Dougherty's back. She looked back at him from the hall.

"You should take a rest, Mr. Merril. You know you make her all worn out too when she sees you like this. Every day the same way and not getting any rest."

"Thank you," Merril said. "I think this is hardly the time to take a vacation."

"You're a very selfish man. That's all your trouble," Mrs. Dougherty answered. "You say you com for her sake, but you don't. You come for your own. —So you won't feel so bad. For you hate sick people all the same. Yes you do, you hate them. I know *you*."

Merril left Mrs. Dougherty outside the nurses' sitting room. She must have stood there, staring his full retreat down the corridor, for he felt her eyes on the nape of his neck. He shuddered once, hunching his shoulders, and walked quickly and quietly as he could, like a boy escaping a haunted house.

He did not feel better until out in his car driving home.

The apartment was cool in contrast to the night in the streets and it was musty. It smelled of camphor, having

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been sealed off for the summer. Ellen had been back in the hospital for two months, and Neddy was sent to camp, and Merril did not wish to commute in solitude from the bungalow by the seashore that had belonged to Ellen's father. He'd decided, with a satisfying twinge of martyrdom, to suffer through the summer in the city. He left the apartment each week-day morning to go to work, and came back to it each night on his return from the hospital. He remained in it over the weekends, and by now he was scarcely aware of the airlessness or the camphor balls.

When he opened the door and stepped into the entryway, he was greeted by an unusually large white light. Ordinarily, he would not have permitted such an indulgence. For example, Ellen had liked to leave on the hall light for Neddy when they went out for dinner.

Ellen said it was a harmless comfort. Merril said it was an indulgence which, however harmless-seeming, was in fact harmful to Neddy, who must learn, from a scroll of tenets, self-reliance and that nothing was going to hurt him in the dark.

It was a difficulty of Ellen's that she looked for disaster wherever Neddy was concerned. It was something pathological in Ellen, a sort of contagious anxiety. She said her father had had something to do with it. But Merril, with due respect to the memory of that thunderous and acquisitive old Draco, knew this was nonsense. What had poisoned Ellen was the shelf of child psychology tomes she held so dear—those, and an ebullient, bow-tie-sporting drink of water named Brattle. Lester H. Brattle, Headmaster. *Dear Parent, This April as in Aprils past Merrivale appeals to your generosity. It is our hope that this year's Easter Pageant will be the most memorable ever. We have planned an unusually...* Merrivale Country Day School, a suburban cluster of oddly angled, spacious-windowed buildings. An embarrassing derivation from Frank Lloyd Wright, to which Neddy was driven on winter mornings at half past eight with five scowling companions wearing mittens and ski caps in a maroon Ranchwagon with yellow acorns on its doors.

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Where Neddy had not yet mastered his multiplication tables but had learned to build a kayak and tended the progeny of two guinea pigs Ellen had given him as a reward for good table manners. "What could be more preposterous?" Merril used to say, "Sweetheart, I ask you." When *he* was Neddy's age, he had had to be content with the Pennsylvania public school system. If he spent his busfare on ice cream, he'd had to walk home, the full four miles. *He* hadn't had a rich, dead Granddaddy.

Merril shut his front door and looked up at the bulb, and was forced to close his eyes. Merril had not turned off the switch for a week. It was indulgence, extravagance, coddling. And yet as long as Ellen lived he could not imagine returning but to bathe at the day's end in this remorseless light. He found a coldness in the hall and a brilliance sharp enough to blind the saints. Merril had purchased the bulb a week ago to replace the smaller weakening one which unaccountably depressed him coming from the hospital, and made him think of death. Although that had been foolish enough, because death, he saw now, did not have to have a sickly yellow. It could as easily hide in glacial white, holy, of such radiance as he'd thought pertained to visions of archangels and other sanctities he was too infected to behold. A light that left you standing paralyzed at your own front door. (Merril fancied he had reached back and snatched from the face of time, which was probably a black winter sky at night, one insignificant particle of a star. And, finding it so very chilly in his hand, had stuck it to the ceiling to observe its heatless burning.)

Off the hall were the dark interiors of the family rooms. Merril's impulse took him into Neddy's, where he sat gingerly on the mattress, as though it were a pane of glass. Always when he went in Neddy's room he had this sense of trespassing, that this was the boy's domain and Ellen's. Ellen heard Neddy's prayers at bedtime here, Neddy shut himself up in here in the evenings, sometimes when friends came by for a drink Merril found Neddy hiding from them in this closet. Neddy slammed this door, once, in his father's face. That

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happened on a Sunday evening last December when Merril discovered his son playing with a yo-yo during the weekly Reading Aloud. *Around the World in Eighty Days* was slammed to the floor, and Neddy had cried, "I was paying attention!" and Merril, moving after his son fast enough to be aware of the air rushing by his cheeks, shouted too, and then Neddy's door slammed, he remembered it clearly, inches from his nose. A long silence, and finally Ellen emerged from the kitchen with a gust of cooking smells, wearing that look of patient wiltedness that drove him wild, and unhesitatingly entered Neddy's room. More silence and at length some murmuring. Merril put on his coat, disgusted, and went out. He crossed the street, soaking his slippers in the sooty snow, and entered the drug store and called up Mary Hagen.

"Tears again, I suppose?" Mary Hagen said. "Everybody's in tears," Merril answered desperately. She would be smiling at him at the other end of the connection, and he knew she was taking care that her voice revealed only the faintest amusement. "This is awful," Merril told her. "And now there's this business of Ellie and the doctors." Mary Hagen said, "The trouble is as much in Ellie as in you. We agreed on that." He said helplessly, "They think she may be really sick. I can't find out from Dagget." She would be smiling all the harder. "I can reassure you about Dagget, darling. My gynecologist tells me he's absolutely tops." He said, "I don't know if you should get into this, Mary. I'm not so sure it's right." And here she permitted herself a light indulgent laugh. "Hugh, you dumb bunny. I'll have to take you in hand."

That was December.

Dr. Dagget performed an exploratory operation in early February and then kept Ellen in the hospital for six weeks of X-ray treatment. Once in the hospital when Ellen inquired casually after Mary Hagen, Merril asked her to please stop making mountains out of molehills.

Neddy's bed was bare. Merril sat on it stiffly, plucking at mattress buttons. Neddy's winter clothes were piled on a

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chair, their pockets lined with mothballs that Ellen had put in them in May. For she was out of the hospital then for over a month. Merril brought her breakfast in bed. They had a day nurse who crooned, "Now isn't that glorious?" when Ellen told her she could *feel* her strength coming back. It was then they decided that Neddy should spend the summer in a different atmosphere. Mary Hagen, who could arrange anything, had been kind enough to arrange for a summer camp in Maine. "I won't send him there, if Mary's mixed up in it," Ellen firmly said. Merril entreated her not to make mountains out of molehills. But Ellen was well enough to enter Neddy in a camp in New Hampshire. She was well enough to manage the spring cleaning, and well enough to hire a maid and well enough to supervise, lying shyly on the sofa, the rolling of the rugs, the waxing of the floors, the draping of the furniture in sheets against dust, and well enough to see that Merril's clothes and Neddy's would be proof against moths. But Ellen had worn herself out by then.

Wily Dr. Dagget deemed it advisable that Ellen return, temporarily, just for convenience's sake, to the hospital, "That way we'll be sure she treats herself to a *real* rest," said Dr. Dagget. Said the experienced and tactful Dr. Dagget—by now Merril was calling him the Benign Healer. Thus cannily he lured Ellen back to the operating table upon which, he was later to confide majestically to Merril ("I don't want to be anything but absolutely on the level with you, Mr. M."), the Benign Healer hoped that she would die. The second incision the Benign Healer made in Ellen's abdomen relieved distension and she would be feeling better for a time. However, it had revealed no trace of the parent tumor, only the increase of dark grapelike things over the peritoneum. Further X-ray would be useless, useless and downright cruel. The Benign Healer shook his silver head and made a fist, as if to smite his responsibility-ridden breast. "I tell you, Mr. M., it's things like this make a man wonder why he wanted to be a surgeon. May I say I think your wife is one of the loveliest persons it's been my privilege in thirty years..." The Benign Healer had mastered the quavering basso. He

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addressed Merril as though from a pulpit. Even his carpeted Consultation Room with its early American furniture and photographs of strapping grandchildren took on a Gothic air.

With Ellen his tone was less awful, and fey at times. Hope. Hope springs eternal—he was delighted by the phrase. He had no right to thwart instinctive hope in any human creature, and there, with a pious lowering of the eyes and some pursing of the lips, he let the subject drop with such emphasis that Merril hesitated to revive it. So, it was determined to sustain Ellen with a series of ingenious cheery nothings as she grew weaker and the weeks dragged on. *Let her believe what she wants to believe*, quoth the Benign Healer. *Who are we to interfere in these questions*?

He was never better then at the bedside, pooh-poohing. One morning in early June he made a whole day blaze with specious promise. Ellen was recovering from the second operation and starting to say again that she could *feel* her strength returning. She was receiving visitors. The room was decked with flowers. Enter the Benign Healer, humming. "Dr. Dagget, am I going to die?" Ellen asked suddenly. And without an instant's pause there came a familiar peal of basso laughter. "Are you going to die, Mrs. M.? Why, I should hope to think! So am I going to die, and so's Mr. M., and so's Mrs. Dougherty here. Wouldn't we be a little piggish to ask otherwise? Gadzooks, smell those roses!" Merril fell against the wall in disbelief, and Ellen smiled as he hadn't seen her smile since Neddy was a baby.

On one wall hung a prize of Neddy's, a mounted barracuda caught by his grandfather off the Bahama Banks. The malevolent little eyes looked into the white light of the hall and were somehow dulled and baleful. On the desk was a walnut stained pipe rack that Neddy had fashioned in the Manual Arts Shop at Merrivale as a Father's Day present and then had reclaimed after a year's disuse as a receptacle for crayons and mechanical pencils. Merril considered these homely objects now with a corrosive kind of poignance; he'd felt the same while reading aloud the little toy soldier is red with rust and his musket moulds in his hands.

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The telephone was on a table in the hall. Merril went to it eagerly and placed the call and was cheerful to the operator, twice spelling out for her phonetically the polysyllabic Indian name of the camp. The call was answered by the wife of the Camp Director who maintained that her boys went to bed at half past nine. Merril pleaded on a note of sentimental urgency which overwhelmed that motherly heart. Neddy's voice, when it came on at last, was frightened.

"Hullo."

"Hello, old man. I thought I'd call up and say hello."

"Hullo—" and here the pause so bewildering to Merril, as Neddy thought what to call his father—"Dad."

"I suppose they have you out on that lake all day, swimming and canoeing and sailing a sailboat?"

"Sometimes."

"Your mother tells me they're teaching you to dive. I wish someone had taught me to dive when I was your age. I was always taking great big belly busters and knocking my wind out," Merril said rapidly, and managed to laugh.

"She called me up tonight," Neddy said.

"She did, did she? Well, that's great."

"I guess she's still in the hospital."

"She's doing fine and there isn't anything to worry about," Merril said.

"She's still in there."

"Just to get rested up," Merril said.

"She sounded tired."

"Well it was late. They probably gave her a sleeping pill."

"She talks as if it hurt her. She can hardly—"

'Now!" Merril said. "Now, we want her to be proud of us. You understand that, don't you? We've got to stick together."

His words, with which he had been faintly pleased, hung in a long silence. Merril saw his son standing on tip-toe in his pajamas to reach the wall telephone in the sitting room of a summer cottage in New Hampshire. No doubt the Camp Director and his wife, good soul, were taking in the scene. No doubt they wondered, as Merril always wondered,

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what went on in the shaggy head, behind the wide eyes.

"You understand I'm not scolding you?" Merril said.

"No. I mean yes. I mean I understand."

"I didn't have a chance to get your birthday present. What would you say to a camera?"

"Sure," Neddy said. "Thank you very much."

"Maybe you'd like a boy scout hatchet. I saw some of those in a hardware store."

"Mrs. Hagen sent me a hatchet.

"Mrs. Hagen?"

"She sent a letter. She said some stuff about me growing up and I ought to have a hatchet for the woods. It was a funny letter."

"I think you should write back and thank her."

"I was going to send her back that hatchet. I have a pretty good hatchet anyway."

Merril could not remember Neddy's being this positive before.

"I've been thinking you might want to go to Canada in September," Merril began. "We'd have a guide and a canoe for fishing and we'd sleep in a cabin. You could help cook. How would you like that? Would you like that?"

"If you would."

"I'm not going to bite you," Merril said.

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In the silence Merril saw again the Camp Director and his good soul wife. They had devoted ruddy faces and simple kindly smiles and they would be sitting up there side by side on some sort of wicker sofa.

Neddy said, "If there's nothing the matter with her, you could make them let her out of the hospital."

"How can I *make* them?" Merril realized that he had shouted. "Oh God. God damn it," he said.

"I better hang up," Neddy said.

"Why can't you talk to me? What is it? I take the trouble to call you up and you refuse to—"

"Please, Dad. Somebody wants to use the phone."

"I can't help that."

"Please."

"I don't understand you," Merril said. "Not the first thing about you." He paused, whether from desperation or lethargy he could not tell, but on the far end of the wire there was no response.

Merril feared for a moment after he slammed down the receiver that he had cracked it. The black instrument was cooling beneath his palm as his own rage turned cold. He was back in himself, afraid of the white light once more, and the ridge of his fingers on his thick right palm began to smart as though he had finished a game of handball.

Merril went into the living room, and it too was partially lit by the light in the hall. He sat in the brass-studded leather chair that Ellen had inherited from her father. He enjoyed sitting here in the evenings, requiring silence from the household as he read manuscripts sent him in cardboard boxes by literary agents. Since his separation from the Navy in 1945 Merril had been employed as Associate Editor in the Trade Department of Benedict Burgess and Son, publishers. In the years ensuing, Merril derived a touch of vanity from his accomplishments—of "finding" a housewife touted as another Katherine Mansfield, of "getting" the memoirs of a disgruntled general, of "fixing" an historical novel rejected by five publishers which—no one was more stupefied than Merril—sold more than three hundred thousand copies. Sometimes

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when a big gun on the Burgess fiction list like Clarence Tolles came East, Merril took him to the theatre and afterwards, since Ellen never accompanied them, to Mary Hagen's apartment where there was liquor and a chosen circle of Tolles' admirers. And he had learned how to comport himself at salesmen's banquets and to address heartily by their first names stupid people whom he despised. Every now and again Merril made a hasty recapitulation of these achievements to justify his usurpation of that armchair in which Ellen's legendary and successful father used to sit.

In other moods he made excoriating judgments. He raged at the hypocrisy of a commercial enterprise which masqueraded as a cultural endeavor. "You would be amazed at the impotence of the printed word." (His audience, invariably, was Ellen.) "Did you ever stop to think how many perfectly intelligent adults can go through life without ever reading a book? And why shouldn't they? We turn them out like toothpaste, we try to sell them like toothpaste, but they don't matter as much as toothpaste. Did you ever think of the quantities of words, words, words the benighted writers struggle over every year? Of the fraction of those that are worth remembering, who *gives* a damn? All the promotion men and Book and Author luncheons since Gutenberg amount to exactly zero. I wish I *were* selling toothpaste!"

These tirades did not shock Ellen, though such may have been their purpose. Rather, they seemed to disgust her. "Hugh, if you really mean that, you should be ashamed of yourself. Why don't you get another job, if that's the way you feel?" Whereas Mary Hagen, to whom he voiced a similar lament, had laughed the sorry thought out of existence: "Poor dope, don't you think you're running off at the mouth a bit?"

The difference in their reactions was the difference in the women. Ellen was, she had been, somehow indisputably lovely. The memory of her as a bride bruised an old sense of unworthiness in Merril. She moved, she had moved, in an aura of blue eyes and mystery and it frightened him. In Ellen lay a shadowy and disturbing wisdom which struck out

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at him from unanticipated directions just when he told himself that it was all under control. With Mary Hagen he felt none of this. She was good looking—he found no other term for her standardized, furs-and-lipstick appearance—and approximately as pert as she had been when as a girl of twenty-four her middle-aged husband had strayed with a girl of nineteen and Mary Hagen, ever the realist, had settled for a short infinity of alimony. She had a brittleness which Merril could conveniently confuse with "guts." She could cajole him or tease him or openly deride him, but this was no more than he asked and he was at ease with her. He was never unsure. Merril recognized this difference often, as he recognized in himself a multitude of interwoven weaknesses. His father-in-law, a belaboring lip-worshiper of God, would have called them sins. Each night, and particularly in this dreadful time, Merril held his self-confessional, and peeled his spirit open like an onion, skin after skin.

Merril pressed his thumb against the swollen finger ridge of his right hand. Lately he had been slamming too many books and kitchen plates and telephones. He longed for the old schedule, to be stopping off at the gym in the evenings to work out in the handball court. He flailed a hard rubber ball against a scarred white wall. He used both hands, right, left, right, left, building a rhythm, approximating a machine. He played alone, a big man in tennis shorts, racing angrily about a vast cold room. It took only half an hour to achieve exhaustion. Afterwards Merril went into the showers, both palms sore and tingling, and stood under the hot water until the last particle of anger was washed away. Then he turned on the cold so hard that his chest felt pierced with needles. The relief came as he walked home from the gym. It was as though his feelings had been smelted out of existence. A brisk walk home in the cold night air and he was ready for anything—a drink with Ellen, a silent supper, a briefcaseful of wasted words. The old schedule, he thought, and nursed his damaged hand.

He rose from the chair and stood a moment among the ghostly sheet-covered forms of the furniture, smelling the

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camphor and dry dust. He walked across a rugless stretch of floor towards the desk where lay the typewritten manuscript of the Burgess Headliner for fall, *The Ethical Path to Dynamic Living*, by a radio clergyman in Southern California. He was about to snap on a lamp when the telephone started ringing in the hall and he knew who it would be by the persistence of the ring. He didn't want to answer.

"I knew it," Mary Hagen said. "Brooding in the dark."

Merril sighed for himself, pitifully. "I talked to Neddy," he said.

"Have you been sitting there in the dark?"

"I have a big light here."

"Have you had supper?" she said. "I don't see why you should go on dragging yourself through hell. I suppose you like it."

"Please," he said.

"I was merely about to suggest that we go somewhere and have a cool drink and a light dinner. Like two grown-up people."

"I didn't ask for sympathy. I'll get something from the icebox," Merril said.

"For five cents, I would gladly run over and wring your neck."

"Mary, I don't think this is a time for us to act selfishly. I won't do anything that would hurt Ellen."

"You are absolutely unbelievable," she said.

"I think this should be the last call for a while. I think it's only right."

"I'm not going to burst into tears, darling. Never fear. I'm not going to get red-eyed and sniffy. Or play Sweet Alice to your Ben Bolt."

"I wish you hadn't said that, Mary."

"Ellie's much too good for you but she trembled with fear at your frown. Do you remember Sweet Alice, Ben Bolt?"

"Shut up," he said. It was an old joke of hers and he had used to laugh at it. It was a sample of her peppery sense of humor. "And don't call her Ellie," he said sharply.

"I've known her longer than you have, my darling."

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"I don't care."

"You've got to stop punishing yourself, Hugh. Ellie is not in pain. She is not going to be in pain," she said. "You're ruining yourself, Hugh. You must try and take an adult point of view."

"You've done enough," Merril answered. "You've done just about enough taking over. Why did you have to send a hatchet to Neddy?"

"O. K." She paused and then she snapped, "Good night, Hugh."

"I'll call you," he said, suddenly apprehensive.

"It's all right, Hugh."

"Mary?" he said desperately. "Mary?"

"Yes?"

"I have to think it all over by myself. Then I'll call you. When I've decided something."

"Decided something?" she laughed. "What could you conceivably decide?"

"I will." He retraced everything. He conceded her everything. "I will decide."

"Good-bye, Hugh. I'm getting tired myself."

"I apologize," Merril said.

"Good-bye."

"I'll call you later in the week."

"Good-bye."

"I'll call you Wednesday," he said. "Mary?"

Even after he found himself listening to the hum of the dead wire it was a full minute before he laid the receiver back in its black cradle and noticed that he had cracked it, after all, when he hung up on Neddy.

A draft blew under the apartment door. He watched a spidery ball of lint scudding out of the light across the dark parlor floor. Merril thought, now I've let her see too much. I have poisoned her too.

When soon the panic and the loss receded, he leaned against the wall, and blinking under the remorseless white light he experienced a sense of being naked. Merril went into the bedroom and straight to bed without washing. He

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lay rigidly, as though Ellen were there, on his alloted side of the bed and gradually it came to him that it was a sweltering night. The first distant rumbles of a thunderstorm sounded high above the city. He got up and opened a window.

"It's been real hot," Mrs. Dougherty was saying. "If I wasn't on duty this week-end I'd get *my*self out to the beach and take a good rest."

The big nurse set Look Magazine aside and continued to smile upon Merril. She had dismissed the subject of last night as deftly as if she were tucking a hospital corner.

It seemed to Merril that he had traveled to the edge of the universe since confronting Mrs. Dougherty last. The aftermath of that nightmare had not left him and even when he looked out the window onto the waving green trees in the park and the bursting summer morning he was weak.

At last he asked, "Will Dr. Dagget be with us today?"

"Not on Saturdays. Saturday he plays golf."

"Of course, forgive a stupid question," Merril started, and then withdrew his feeble shaft of irony.

"I think you'll find your missus feeling spry this fine morning." Mrs. Dougherty cheerfully got up.

Down the corridor, a short distance from the Reception Desk, Ellen's door opened to permit the emergence of a wheel-table laden with towels and metal bowls and pushed by a woman wearing the apricot uniform of the Pavilion.

"Now you can go right in. She's finished her bed bath," Mrs. Dougherty said. "She wants to look pretty because her sister's coming.—Mrs. Robert Gowan," she explained, noting Merril's surprise. "I think Mr. Gowan is coming too."

"They're not bringing their children?"

"Mrs. Gowan didn't mention it on the telephone."

"They can't bring the children," Merril said.

Ellen lay upon a bank of pillows, attempting to tie a blue ribbon into a bow on top of her brown hair and Merril went to her and tied the bow and kissed her piously on the forehead. "Isn't it a glorious morning?" Ellen said. "I thought I'd dress up a little because Georgica's coming,—oh,

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and Bob." Merril agreed it was a fine day for a visit. He said Ellen looked as though she'd had a good night's rest, she looked fine. He leaned over the bed and fussed the ribbon bow, knowing all it meant to her, and he kept bravely smiling into her face.

Ellen's face, what remained of her face, was a suggestion. The eyes were there, the lips, and nose, but the familiar skin once pliable beneath his fingers clung hungrily to the chin and cheekbones. The eyes were deeper and darker than Merril remembered and they gave the face a dreadful and abstracted beauty which he could look upon no longer.

"Darling?" she asked. "They're not going to bring the children?"

"I shouldn't think so," Merril answered.

"I couldn't let the children see me, Hugh."

"Ah, that's no way to talk."

Then Merril noticed that for the first time in days she was not taking intravenous feeding. The glass globe was gone from its rack above her head and a fresh strip of adhesive was stuck on her forearm, across a punctured vein. Both arms must be riddled now, he thought. A hundred tiny punctures done in the name of mercy. Once he'd overheard the nurses talking. There are just so many veins in the arm, one of the nurses said. Then we start the legs. But if phlebitis develops, it's almost always in the legs.

"But I *am* better," Ellen said. "Isn't it the darnedest thing, I can *feel* the strength coming back? I'm going to have some lunch today. Actually. Some poached egg."

"That's grand," he said.

Ellen smiled and strained her words with a sort of urgency. "Darling, why don't you do something *pleasant*? It's the loveliest day."

He pretended to be looking out the window, to be lost in thought.

"Georgica will be here after all. Please go to the beach, darling. Darling Hugh."

"If I wanted to go the beach I would go to the beach," he answered carefully.

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"*Please* have a pleasant day. Why don't you call Mary Hagen?"

"Really, Ellie."

"I don't mind. I'm not going to be bitchy," she said.

"Bitchy? Did I ever say you were bitchy?"

"I'm not afraid of her, Hugh. I don't think I even resent her any more. Since I've been sick and you've been here and I am just getting to know you. Now, I'm getting sentimental. I'm embarrassing you," she said.

"Of course you're not embarrassing me," Merril answered. He was looking out into the cramped air shaft. A bald man in candy striped pajamas sat on the edge of his bed in the Men's Ward and poured himself a glass of water.

"Go to the beach," Ellen pleaded. "Please go."

He turned and stared at her, bewilderingly thin and small in the bed, with the bowed blue ribbon in her hair. He felt for that moment capable of speaking out, of communicating in a spate of words. "I've wasted so much time, Ellie. We're getting middle-aged—" and there he stopped himself, wondering why he could not gather up his thoughts before they drifted off forever into muteness and confusion.

"You could have had anything you wanted if you hadn't been afraid. You could have had Mary," Ellen told him softly, "and you could have had me and Neddy, whichever you wanted. And you didn't dare have any of us. I wish you saw that, Hugh. It's foolish to punish yourself because I won't punish you. Please," she said gently, "you're so worn out. Call up somebody and find something pleasant to do when it's a nice day."

"I'm not going to call Mary. We're not going to mention her name again," he answered. "I want to make that perfectly clear. I hate her and that's the truth, Ellie."

"Don't you understand? Darling, I used to mind dreadfully but I don't care about Mary Hagen any more and if after I'm gone—"

"Ellie!" He took a wild step towards her and checked himself. "That's a fine way to talk," he said. "That *is* sentimental. Who's being silly now?" He went on this way

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in monologue, prattling and coaxing, until he discovered that he was merely imitating the Benign Healer and that she wasn't listening at all.

"I don't care any more," Ellen said, from the depths of her daydream, "about any of it." She made a small motion of one arm that took in, in their cruel sequence, the hospital, this room, and herself in the bed.

"Ellie, don't," Merril said.

"I wanted to divorce you."

"You had every right," he said.

"And since I've been ill, you've been here always—feeling guilty and making rows." She smiled at him.

"I've been a brick," he said.

"It doesn't matter," Ellen said. "I loved you better than I loved anybody in the world."

"Don't, Ellie."

She smiled at Merril, knowingly, as though she meant to ask him, what was so frightening about that? He fell silent for a time, toiling within himself. "I can't help making rows," he said and he spoke painfully, his lips atremble like a schoolboy's. "Ellie, I want to say that I love you—and I always will love you."

Ellen asked him to read aloud. He took up the Oxford Book of American Verse and read to her from "The Song of the Open Road" as he sat in a wooden armchair by the bed. In less than half an hour the door was flung open and Ellen's younger sister Georgica burst in. Bob Gowan, an habitually smiling, secondary figure hovered behind his wife. He held awkwardly in one hand the handle of a bell jar which contained a nourishing broth that Georgica had made at home, and he embraced in his arms a vast spray of gladioli.

"Hello, hello," Georgica said, making straight for the bed. Her navy blue dress gave her the appearance of being fatter than she was because it was sleeveless and Georgica made much use of a fleshy pair of freckled arms. "What a divine hair ribbon!"

"Hugh tied it," Ellen said.

Georgica Gowan talked on breathlessly until noon about

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the outrageous costs of living, and then Merril descended with her and the ever-smiling Bob for a hasty lunch in the basement cafeteria. He picked at a codfish cake and listened in snatches to his sister-in-law, who attached herself to him like a delirious bobby-soxer: "Hugh, you poor *angel*!... There is *no* justice on earth. I said to Bob last night, 'Bob...'"

They found that Ellen had not done well with her lunch. A cup of Georgica's beef broth sat untouched on the tray. One of the poached eggs was untouched. "We don't have much sympathy for each other, that egg and I," she told them as a joke, and Georgica looked smitten and Bob gave one high and frenzied laugh. Ellen was tiring; the noontime sedatives were claiming her. So Merril walked the Gowans to the elevators and said good-bye and Georgica was crying and beside her Bob, wearing that inobliterable smile, hesitatingly offered her his arm. Merril did not wait with them for the car to come.

Because he found the room very warm, he turned on the fan trademarked Tropik-Breeze. Ellen hated its sucking noise. She asked him to switch it off, and fighting against sleep she tried to tell Merril of her dreams about being in a submarine. Last night she dreamed of going down down, all by herself with that whirring machine to breathe by, to the bottom of the ocean and she knew that, because it was only a machine, it could not whir forever. And she had been frightened because she knew that sooner or later the whirring would end in a grating, clattering sound like the morning she stripped the gears of the Plymouth. ("You were terribly angry, Hugh. I can't forget.") She woke in a panic and rang for the night nurse to turn off that ghastly Tropik-Breeze.

So Merril opened the window instead, optimistically, since the freshness of the morning was long past and the sun's heat hung dead in the air shaft. He lowered the shade and turned to smile at Ellen, but she had gone off by then. Her mouth lay slightly open and she was already breathing the long shuddering breaths he had taught himself not to hear. One day he'd inquired of Dr. Dagget what the Cheyne-Stokes breathing was going to sound like and the Benign Healer

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frowned ponderously and replied that it was just a medical term.

Merril sat and dozed and perspired in the wooden chair by the bed for the remainder of the afternoon. A pair of houseflies, somehow bound to this room like he and Ellen, described lonely circles beyond his reach, returned to buffet themselves against the windowscreen, finally to drop to the sill and recoup themselves, their wings twitching malevolently, black, in an intense patch of sun. One fly careened off Merril's temple. He swung after it hopelessly with his big hand, but he was surprised at not being angry, because the presence of insects was intolerable here. Movie stars and senators and foreign chiefs of state flocked here to humble themselves before the gods of Antisepsis, to beseech them their wonders to perform amid the neurosurgical clinics and therapy programs and biopsy labs, with the twenty-four million volt betatron which had almost, with accidental mercy, killed Ellen last month. All the engines of Hygeia. And here, in the heart of the Temple, a microbe-ridden insect had left a track of invisible filth across his hot forehead. He would raise hell, complain to Dr. Dagget. Oh, Lord, whatever for? He felt himself worn and powerless, complacent. Even the hearty indispensable sense of outrage had left him. He did not care.

Ellen slept with her head deep in a pillow. Merril made out the edge of this morning's blue ribbon nearly lost in the brown, disordered hair. She lay motionless, but for the hands which rose from her sides at the start of each long breath. The fingers clutched in spasms, and yet with what seemed a conscious intricacy, as if on a phantom rosary. It struck Merril, watching, that a sleeping infant has no control of its hands. They grasp, assert, protest, surrender, in obedience to life's first mystery; so then, to face life's last, we are brought back full circle to the same precise obedience.

Later Ellen startled him by rising in the bed.

"I don't want them to force Neddy," she said, looking him full in the eyes.

"What?" He was so taken aback by her literal tone that

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his reaction was to accept her statement querulously. "What are you talking about?"

"At the camp."

"Yes, at the camp" He collected himself.

"They've no right forcing him to dive high dives if he doesn't want to."

"They won't force him. I'll see to it," Merril said.

"That's very deep water," Ellen said.

"I know it is," he told her. "Don't you worry."

She sank back into the pillow mumbling. When the room was darker and the translucent window shade had turned dull with the receding of the sun, Merril was aware of the old man's cry repeating itself in the air shaft. *Hah-mah! Hah-maree! Hah-mah! Hah-mah! Hah-maree!* Sometimes there was a pause long enough for Merril to think it was over, that some emotional doctor had rushed in with a hypodermic full of air. But no one was emotional here—in the Temple. *Hah-mah!* Merril suspected there was a common language among the cruelly dying. When the aircraft carrier on which he served took on a Kamikaze, three men had burned to death within yards of him. The two seamen who were eighteen years old and fresh out of boot camp had not surprised him by calling for their mothers, but the Captain, an Annapolis man, had bellowed rhythmic monosyllables so unbearable that the Executive Officer asked for a .45 and blew the top off the Captain's head. *Hah-mah! Hah-maree!* And now finally a nurse must have gone in there, because he was quieting down.

The long stalks of Georgica Gowan's gladioli were crushed into a small vase of hospital crockery. Their husky odorless blossoms bulking with good intentions drooped and dominated the bedtable. Merril smiled at the uplifting brochures which the hospital Chaplain had left on the shelf below. When she was up to holding a book Ellen had read only The Book of Common Prayer, according to the use of the Protestant Episcopal Church. At the age of fourteen she was confirmed and her father had presented it, with a distant inscription on the flyleaf. The Lord is my Shepherd, therefore shall I lack

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nothing—neither Emmet Fox nor get-well-quick-cards nor gladioli. And Ellen had liked to look through the yellow photographs on the black pages of her album. There were pictures of Neddy in various phases of growth, of herself getting older, of Merril in his lieutenant-commander's uniform, and in various subsequent phases of stagnation. Ellen had written the captions, in white ink. "Like father, like son"—Merril pretending to balance Neddy on a lopsided seesaw. "I become domestic"—Ellen in a makeshift bandanna beating rugs on a clothesline. The earliest snapshots were taken abroad before Merril's day. (*Où sont les neiges d'antan*?) Ellen and her father at low tide before Mont Saint Michel. Ellen and Georgica on the Acropolis, smiling upon the caryatids of the Erectheum. Merril snapped the album shut and replaced it hastily. Doing so, he knocked open at his foot the Oxford Book of American Verse; he retrieved it and began to read:

> "Hope is the thing with feathers
> That perches in the soul,
> And sings the tune without the words,
> And never stops at all."

Ellen had murmured, "I'm glad I wasn't Emily Dickinson," one afternoon when her lips were hot and very dry. Merril had stared at her, startled; for that moment it seemed as though she were already dead. The thought plunged him more deeply into herself than he had ever gone. He felt only the dumb struggling of his heart and afterwards as in a damp cave of memory he came upon the lurking spectre of himself, The Oaf.

> "Do you remember Sweet Alice, Ben Bolt?
> Sweet Alice, whose hair was so brown.
> Who wept with delight when you gave her a smile,
> And trembled with fear at your frown!"

There was no ceiling to his grief, and not the weariest recog-

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nition of sentimentality. Merril sat in the stiff chair and gazed across an abyss at his wife. He felt the hundred angers cooling since last night flowing through him in an infinite cloudy stream, making him a conduit for all the tears shed since time began.

When it was over, he left the room and went into the corridor where a young doctor was examining charts.

"Is it hot enough for you?" the young man asked. He was no more than thirty years old and though he was some sort of assistant of the Benign Healer's, Merril had decided to like this boy. He would make a real doctor some day, Merril would swear it by the shy pop eyes and the pale fat face.

"They run you pretty ragged?"

"I guess that's what we're here for," the doctor said.

"Meantime the good Dr. Dagget is out on the golf course."

"He's a fine surgeon, Dr. Dagget." He looked at Merril uneasily.

"My wife's asleep now," Merril said abruptly.

"That's the best thing."

"I suppose you see this kind of thing all the time."

"Not all the time."

"I don't envy you taking up medicine. It isn't the answer."

"It's part of the answer."

"You people have no right to claim miracles."

"We don't," the young doctor said.

"Well, tell me this, is she going to feel as much as that old man?"

"I would doubt it. He came much too late."

"You can drug him."

"We have to go slowly."

Merril grinned. "So he'll last as long as possible?"

"If you like to put it that way."

"I appreciate that you people have to be pretty cold-blooded."

"Sometimes. We don't enjoy being."

"I know," Merril said. "You can't be murderers. Mustn't demean Hippocrates."

The doctor turned his young, moon face into a smile of such

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sad dignity and forgiveness that Merril was shamed by it.

"I guess you know what's going to happen," the doctor said. "I doubt she'll be in any bad pain. You can feel that tumor in her abdomen like a salad bowl, and it will get bigger. She's in the best place she could be anyway. The comforting thing is she's already started on drugs and so we can build up gradually."

"Sweet Jesus," Merril said. A suggestion of formaldehyde seeped up from some laboratory on a floor below. He looked vaguely down the corridor where two ward boys were pushing an empty stretcher. The afternoon was waning. Mrs. Dougherty had long since gone home on a trolley car carrying her girdle in a brownpaper bag. Down at the western end where the porch was, the sunlight fell in at an angle making slender shadows of the iron grill against the linoleum floor.

The doctor said, "What you have to remember about these patients is that they'll fight like wildcats out of corners to keep from going under. When I was an intern there was a physician who when he couldn't stomach it any more would go in to a patient and say, 'Tonight I'm going to trust you with these pills. Be sure you take only a couple because if you take a handful by accident you won't be here in the morning!' And when I'd go in in the morning the pills were always right there by the bed—a little white pile with only two missing. Why, I could bet you dollars to little round doughnuts that if we were to go in to that fellow tonight and leave him a dozen seconals..."

"Say," Merril said, "Are you tied up?"

"No," the doctor said. "No more than usual."

"I mean right now?"

"Well not any more than usual."

"Maybe we could go out for a few minutes and get a cigarette in the park. Perhaps I could interest you in letting me buy you a drink." Merril spoke quickly. "You see, I'm alone all the time."

But he knew beore he finished that it was a ridiculous request to make of an unknown doctor on his rounds, and he knew that he could never leave the brown tundra of his

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spirit, that he was beyond communion or confidence of any sort.

Merril left the hospital by himself and made his way to the street where his car was parked. Some small boys on roller skates were playing with toy hockey sticks and a dirty tennis ball. As he went through them a gust of hot wind blew across the littered sidewalk and lodged a fragment in his eye. He paused a moment from the sting and as he was wiping at the eye with a handkerchief one of the boys crashed against his leg, fell, righted himself and, to the shrill delight of his companions, shouted and gestured obscenely at Merril's back.

The green Plymouth sedan was fifteen feet away, its windows heavy with soot and a scarlet parking ticket on its windshield. He patiently untied the ticket from the wiper and studied the formidable language of the summons before he unlocked the car. He got behind the wheel, unrolled the window, and was rereading the ticket when a policeman rapped on the door.

"What's on *your* mind?"

Merril noticed first the policeman's dark shirt well sweated through at the collar, the stomach, and deep under the arms. The policeman's face was streaked and grimy and angry from walking all the hot days away on filthy streets. It reminded Merril of his own.

"I asked a simple question, Georgie." The policeman pointed to a sign.

"Loading Zone. No Standing or Parking. Eight A. M. to Seven P. M. Monday through Friday," Merril read aloud. "Per Order Police Department."

"Let me advise you, don't snot me. It so happens this is a warehouse. There has to be free access, and you've been sittin' on it all day. I can impound your car, you know it. So have a care. I'll bag you, Georgie."

"You're right, Officer, and I'm wrong and I apologize."

"That's nice. So you can come to court with a clear conscience "

"I'll pay my fine, Officer."

"Hey, what's the matter? There anything the matter?"

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Merril said nothing and rolled up the window. It was like an oven inside the car. The policeman moved off indifferently while Merril stared after him. Suddenly he felt an irresistible weariness. For a moment he fought against it with tightened wrists, but his moist hands were already slipping on the plastic steering wheel and he let himself slump forward. He was aware of his eyes pressed tight together, his mouth opened, and his shoulders heaving—up and down up and down. Then his cheeks were cool and off the backs of his hands he tasted his own tears. Very slowly he began to hear the sound of the horn blaring steadily under the weight of his chest. Recoiling from the steering wheel, he had a glimpse of the policeman turning and looking back at him with a startled frown. Merril was a big and powerful man who two seasons had played right tackle at the University of Pennsylvania. He sobbed in great spasms and whimpered at the end of every breath.

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THE BATTLE

Helmet and rifle, pack and overcoat,
Marched through a forest. Somewhere up ahead
Guns thudded. Like the circle of a throat
The night on every side was turning red.

They halted and they dug. They sank like moles
Into the clammy earth between the trees,
And slept. The sentries, standing in their holes,
Felt the first snow. Their feet began to freeze.

At dawn the first shell landed with a crack.
Then shells and bullets swept the icy woods.
This lasted many days. The snow turned black.
The corpses stiffened in their scarlet hoods.

Most clearly of that battle I remember
The tiredness of eyes, how hands looked thin
Around a cigarette, and the bright ember
Would pulse with all the life there was within.

—Louis Simpson

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LETTERS FROM INDIANA

I

From Mrs. Sarah Yates in Washington Springs, Indiana, to her Mother in Troy, Pennsylvania.

June 15, 1912.

Dear Mama,

You'd best not come right now. Alonzo is terribly excited about Theodore Roosevelt. He stays at the newspaper until all hours of the night. He thinks the whole future of the country depends on "getting that fat man out of the White House." I've tried to calm him, but you know how Alonzo is. He has made all kinds of enemies in town here, and is carrying on a ferocious battle with John Kemper, editor of the paper over in Afton. He hates John Kemper. He looks at me funny every time his name comes up. You may not remember, Mama, but this is the John Kemper who was courting me at the same time as Alonzo. I don't think Alonzo ever liked him. But he's hated him really, ever since Kemper wrote that editorial, *America Expects Every Lion To Do His Duty*, when Teddy went to Africa. Alonzo wanted to go over to Afton and thrash Kemper then, and it took Sheriff Mimms to talk him out of it. Don't you remember, when I married Alonzo you said his temper would be his ruination? I'm having reason to remember those words. Still he hasn't been beat up by those ruffians across the tracks in a long time now. If he just wouldn't get so excited about everything. He's also in the midst of his annual campaign against

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liquor and cigarette smoking. People are beginning to complain that he doesn't print any news in the paper except all those black headlines about DEMON RUM. Several of the men around town have taken to smoking and Alonzo threatened to resign as Superintendent of the Sunday School unless, as he put it, his fellow Christians put off foul tobacco and come to an understanding with God. I don't dare say anything.

We're all getting ready for the Fourth of July here and I suppose you are too. Alonzo is going to give the speech on liberty in the park, the same one he always gives on the Fourth. I pray nothing goes wrong. Everyone will be there of course, and if anyone in the audience makes fun of him I shudder to think what might happen. It was months before we got over the last Fourth, if you remember, with Alonzo pouring out all those young men's liquor and them beating him up so badly. I wish we could have a quiet and peaceful Independence Day.

I always dread the coming of summer because of Delia, and I can't help it Mama. She gets so restless when school is out and she doesn't have her children to teach anymore. In your last letter you mentioned that she might get married this year. Dear Mama! I know Delia has always been your favorite daughter but you must realize that she is forty-five now and a hopeless old maid. The only problem now is to keep her calm. Alonzo is very good to her and sometimes it takes a lot of patience. One thing that keeps her busy right now is an organization called The American Sir Galahad Knights, a sort of study group for the high school children in town. They seem to enjoy it, coming here to the house for lemonade and going on parties with Delia as chaperon. Delia has some big buttons made which all the children wear, with ASGK written on them. That's what the thing is called, the ASGK. It keeps Delia busy, and it's a good thing for the children, except that I heard from several mothers that things went on at a hayride the other night that shouldn't have gone on. I don't know whether that's true or not.

That young man I told you about, Harry Jackson, has been showering his attentions on Cora, and they seem to

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care for each other. How awful to lose one's daughter when she's so soon out of the Seminary! Cora came to me and asked me if she could speak to her father about letting the young man court her formally, but I advised against that until we manage to get by the Fourth of July. Alonzo has so much to think about. Mr. Jackson is a drummer. He sells Sloan's Liniment all over Indiana. A very nice young man although he dresses in clothes a little too colorful. But how things have changed Mama! I remember that Papa wouldn't even let me speak to Alonzo without being present himself, and here Cora writes letters to this young man all the time and I have no idea at all what she says. The old days are gone now.

I suppose you're dying to hear some news of Little Odie. Well you certainly would have been proud of him the other week Mama. You were so pleased with his rendering of O Ship of State when he graduated from grammar school, and I think it's no doubt true like you say that he is the creative member of the family. He must get that from Alonzo. Herman Schmerhorn, who heads the Silver Cornet Band, must think so too because he asked Odie to produce the sound effects at a band concert last Sunday in the park. Alonzo, and I went, of course, and we were so proud! Odie stood behind the bandstand with his shotgun, and he was supposed to be ready to fire when the Silver Cornet Band played the Anvil Chorus. What actually happened was that Herman Schmerhorn raised his arm at the wrong time and Odie started firing in the middle of Ethelbert Nevin's Narcissus, but Mr. Schmerhorn made up for his mistake by going immediately into the Anvil Chorus, with the other instruments coming along. Odie kept shooting and loading, and then the band really caught the spirit. The effect was electrical! Everyone clapped wildly at the finish, and Mr. Schmerhorn went down under the bandstand and brought Odie up. Odie took a bow right on the bandstand! It was wonderful, and I was so proud. Do you think I should see about giving him music lessons?

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II

From Miss Cora Yates in Washington Springs, Indiana to Mr. Harry Jackson in Evansville, Indiana.

June 21, 1912

Dearest Harry,

I am so emboldened to address you thus. Never before, O you must believe me, have I addressed a gentleman so. It's your wonderful cards and letters that move me. I hope you won't think awful things of me, that I address you so. If you did I'd die. And I know that young ladies don't say things like this in a letter, or in person either, but we have been such wonderful *friends*, that I am emboldened. It was so kind of you to send the year's supply of Sloan's Liniment, and I can certainly make good use of it. I certainly hope you are selling lots of Liniment, and keeping the people happy. Do you remember the wonderful night you told me that was the object of the Liniment? What memories we have, Harry! But I dare not talk about what you say, Harry, because you said so many things in your last letter. Some of them I simply can't mention. It wouldn't be proper. I want to say something about the others if I can get up the nerve.

I've never had a gentleman go to the trouble of explaining things so clearly as you do. I know I'm just a young lady and not supposed to understand a lot of what you say, but I think it's wonderful! Don't think that I talk about the wonderful things we have between us to anyone else, but I did ask Papa about Mr. Debs. My Papa has an awful temper, and it was clear to me that he didn't like Mr. Debs. He doesn't like him at all. Papa called him a "filthy anarchist." Papa is really quite narrow and not sympathetic with "the new generation" you've been telling me about. Anyway, Papa has a terrible temper and it wouldn't do for you to mention Mr. Debs to him. He would be awfully mad. You know that Papa fights all the time. Ever since I've been a little girl Papa has been fighting people for all kinds of reasons. He used to show up for his Sunday School class with his eye

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all puffed up, and not being able to see, with his glasses broken. The man that fits glasses here in Washington Springs has made a fortune on Papa. The awful thing is that Papa never *wins* any fights. He always gets beat up. But he afterwards describes himself as a very dangerous man. That's why I don't want you to mention Mr. Debs, Harry. Just last month I saw him have a ridiculous contest with a gentleman in the Square, by the fountain. I just happened to be passing by when I saw this group of gentlemen arguing. There was Papa right in the middle of it. As near as I could understand one of the gentlemen had been flying a red flag in his backyard. At least someone said he had, but he denied it. This gentlemen was quite big, and all he kept saying was that he did *not* fly a red flag in his backyard, and that he was a one hundred percent patriotic American. It was absolutely none of Papa's business but he spoke up anyway. The other man was so much bigger than he was.

"A dirty Red!" said Papa.

"I never flew no red flag," said the gentleman politely, "and I believe in the American Republic."

"Don't profane the blessed name of our country!" said Papa. He swung at the gentleman, but missed. More to protect himself than anything else the big man pushed Papa down. That made Papa mad and so they started fighting all round the fountain. Papa was beaten up terribly, but everyone kept shouting anyway, "Give it to him, Major!" Finally when Papa had broken his glasses and couldn't see any more, he said, "I guess that'll teach you not to fly any more red flags in this town!"

"I never flew no red flags," said the other gentleman. "I hang out my red underwear sometimes, and that may be what you're talking about, but I never flew no red flags. I'm a one hundred percent American."

Papa grumbled and said, "Well just don't fly *anything* red in this town, or I'll have to teach you another lesson!"

That's why I tell you not to mention Mr. Debs, Harry. Papa hasn't expressed an opinion on you yet, but I just know we would never be able to be together in the way you men-

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tioned in your letter if Papa thinks you like Mr Debs. I know you're wondering why I haven't said anything about the wonderful question you asked me in your letter. Right now I'll get to that. Yes, Harry.

That's my answer to your wonderful question. But I'll have to talk to Papa about it of course. If you can come down on the Fourth of July, you can speak to him too. It sounds so wonderful, going to Chicago and all that. Just think of all the people that can buy Sloan's Liniment there. What you say about living in an apartment sounds wonderful. No one in our family has ever gone to live in the city. I'll be the first one. Be sure to remember what I told you about Papa. It's not easy to be a newspaper editor, and Papa has so many worries. He's so unhappy about Theodore Roosevelt. So don't mention that. And you must be against smoking and the consuming of liquor. It's safer that way. I don't want to make my poor Papa unhappy, but I will marry you. Let's just let Mr. Debs be a secret between you and me.

III

From Mr. Harry Jackson in Evansville, Indiana, to Miss Cora Yates.

June 25, 1912

Dearest,

I address you dearest because you are dearest, or *were* dearest. It is no easy job carrying my samples through the hot sun, (somet mes the bottles explode) and I feel I am fully justified in my attitude. And what is my attitude? Pained, I say. All day long I struggle with my samples, unflinchingly, always moving forward, an exploited salesman for capital. Sloan's Liniment is rich, but am I rich? You're supposed to be *for* me, not against me. Are you for Sloan's Liniment or me? That's the only question to be answered here. Is it better to cleave to Sloan's Liniment or me—that is the question! I thought you had made up your mind, but you

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haven't. I could tell by your letter that you have anti-socialistic tendencies. You ridicule the great socia' leader Eugene Debs, not realizing that in this one great soul lies your own chance of salvation. If you had to carry all those bottles of Sloan's Liniment you wouldn't be so quick to attack Eugene Debs—he who is fighting the great fight. I am moved to defend him. I am terribly moved to defend him. The reason you're not moved is because you've had it too easy. You're not an orphan like me. And you don't have to carry those bottles of Sloan's Liniment all over Indiana. You aren't exploited by capital! I don't think I need repeat the pitiful story of my life. I've had to work for everything I've gotten. I'm a self-made man. I was left a complete orphan at the age of six and one half, and now I have the enviable record of being... The truth is I hadn't planned to tell you. I'm not so proud of it myself, feeling the way I do about Sloan's Liniment. What happened is, the central office in Chicago has awarded me the Midwestern Prize for the year 1911 for selling more Liniment than anyone else. It's a beautiful golden statuette, an exact replica of the bottle containing this elixir of life. Of course I have nothing against Sloan's Liniment itself. I use it myself. It's the Liniment I sell and not the company. But I know a capitalistic combination to exploit the workers when I see one. That's why I'm pained that you want me to adhere to your father's way of thinking. A man must be a man! I was talking about that with one of my friends the other night. We were sitting in the hotel in Eutaw Hill, awaiting supper, and this fellow told me that what America needs now is a *social sense*. All I can say is that I'm one hundred percent behind that. One hundred percent! Every man should have a social sense, and *use* it. It has to be used. That's what this fellow told me, and I believe him. He's a brilliant man, although I have heard that he sometimes takes the names off tombstones, which is illegal in his business. (He sells Penny-A-Day burial insurance.) But that may just be talk, since the man who made that accusation is a noted embezzler, besides selling men's suspenders. Well, as we sat there in the hotel lobby

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at Eutaw Hill, awaiting supper, I was struck by those words, *social sense.* All through supper Floyd (that's this fellow's name) talked to me about society and America. He's a jolly sort of fellow and I had to laugh when he said that the average American "would steal the pennies off his grandmother's grave." After supper I had planned to go right to bed, since I had to go on to Fort Wayne early the next morning. However, Floyd insisted that I come along with him to see a lady who he said was a "victim of capital." It seems that Floyd does some social work, helps people and everything, in his spare moments at night. I was proud to go along with him. He told me this lady illustrated his point. We walked to where this lady lived, in a secluded cottage down by the railroad tracks. She gave Floyd an affectionate hug when we went in, which shows you how grateful she was for his *social sense.* She was a large woman and when she smiled I could see a golden tooth. Altogether a pleasant homely-looking lady in a gingham house dress. We went to the rear of her little cottage (painted yellow) where there was a vine-covered pavilion, and he and Floyd drank some beer. I said I didn't want any, because you know I don't drink. The lady's name was Irene, and she was very familiar, kept calling me *hon* and things like that. But after all, it's the lowly of the world, those without the opportunity to learn manners, that the social sense is supposed to help. All I can say is that it was a revelation to see it in action. That poor woman was so obviously grateful to Floyd for his using the social sense on her, she kept patting him on the face, and even tried to sit on his lap once. I thought that was unnecessary, but like I said, she was a familiar type of woman. I had to leave before long, but Floyd stayed behind, and it would have done your heart good to have heard them laughing together so happily as I walked away in the darkness. It just shows you how happy we could all be if we'd get together and use the *social sense.*

I told you this story so you would understand a little how I feel. You know I want to marry you, or I wouldn't have asked you, but I have my principles and ideals. It's just like

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Floyd says, "the social sense is inviolate." So you wouldn't want me to renege on my ideals, would you?

I'll see you on July Fourth, and to make things easier, why don't you tell your father about the Sloan's Liniment statuette? (golden). I don't think he likes me.

IV

Miss Delphia Kilgore, in her Diary

July 1

O the things I have to tell you today! What a wonderful summer this has been. I have no one else to tell all this to but you. No one else would understand—except maybe Harry, or Mr. Jackson I should say, since I don't really know him well enough to call him by his first name! We could do so many things together that we don't do now—we can't really. But the things we do now are wonderful! I told you about how he swam the Cahaba River, just to be with me one night. (I mentioned Lord Byron in that respect too.) Well, last night he came again, and this time he had written a poem. It was called *She Walks In Beauty*, and I was very flattered. (Again I was reminded of Lord Byron.) He has definitely decided to become a poet, and devote all his time to that. It seems that Sloan's Liniment is going to act as his patron, so that he will have the necessary leisure to develop his sensibilities. I was so happy for him! I was so happy I almost called him by his first name. You remember, of course, I told you of his secret love for poetry, and how he admired Lord Byron. Now he will have ample opportunity to pursue his dreams, having a patron and everything. Of course he must dedicate all his poems to Sloan's Liniment. Well as I was saying, he came last night with this poem and we sat and talked. In my room, I'm afraid. Do you think that's wrong? I took precaution that everything would be very proper—I mean I let him know that I was no *easy* woman.

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That was difficult, with his flashing eyes and curly hair. Such a devil. I called him mad, bad, sad Harry Jackson, and that pleased him. He told me a little more about himself last night—how he got the slight limp he has, and about his father, who was a very interesting person. I didn't dare tell Mr. Jackson that I love him, things are so unsettled. There's plenty of time for that anyway. There's no sense in rushing things. We're all young yet! Well we sat in my room and talked. He sat in the wicker chair and I sat in the rocker. He stared at the bed several times, but I ignored that. What a bad boy! Then, as I say, he read this poem he had written, *She Walks In Beauty*, and I was thrilled. I wanted to communicate with him, but communication is so difficult, especially with someone so impervious as mad, bad, sad Harry Jackson. I finally did break through my shyness and told him about the ASGK. The American Sir Galahad Knights! He was so enthusiastic about it, that I told him about the whole thing.

"You mean you give all your time to those young people?" he asked me.

"But I want to," I said, smiling slightly.

His dark eyes were full of admiration.

"I took them on a hayride recently," I said. (I was determined to be modest but I wanted him to understand my character.) "We had a wonderful time, in the hay and everything. I was so filled with nostalgia. It was like hearing violins play all the time, what with the clop-clop of the horse hooves going down the old country road. We went over to Tishimingo Lake, and I could have sworn I heard old Tishimingo himself calling to his daughter." (I explained to Mr. Jackson about legends and the Indians, and he seemed visibly moved.) "When we got to the lake I read them an adventure of Sir Galahad, while they toasted their marshmallows. After the excitement of the Sir Galahad adventure I thought it best to calm them down, so I read a little from *Moral Thoughts For Young Ladies* by Percy Whortleberry. I can see their round, bright eyes staring at me now, as I instilled them with Christian doctrine. It was while I was

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watching their bright, round eyes that I realized Frankie Jenkins and Dolores Smith were missing. I called their names. No answer. A preliminary investigation failed to reveal their whereabouts. A few giggles and pointed fingers prompted me to walk down an uninhabited path. A hundred yards down the path I came upon the culprits, in a scene that would have embarrassed Sir Galahad.

'What are you doing?' I asked calmly.

'What does it look like!' said that awful Frankie Jenkins.

(At this point in my recital to Mr. Jackson, I lowered my head, as I thought was proper).

"I felt it was best to ignore the whole thing, and to show that I wasn't the least disturbed; I walked away without a word. Later I had one of the boys take them a toasted marshmallow, just to show the ASGK that Miss Delphia Yates was a wonderful sport. It worked beautifully, and I didn't let the incident disturb the even tenor of our Christian outing. Do you understand Mr. Jackson?"

That was how I said it.

"Do you understand, Mr. Jackson?" I said.

"It was a magnificent thing you did!" said Mr. Jackson emphatically.

I was quite shaken.

"Do you really think so?"

"It's a marvelous thing you're doing for these young people, affording them the opportunity to share your own delicate experiences. You are so..."

He was so thrilled he couldn't go on.

At precisely that moment he must have decided to act He moved his wicket chair over closer to me, and before you could say Jack Robinson, he had placed his hand on mine, breathing heavily.

I remonstrated with him. Believe me I did. But alas, to no avail! I have learned there is no way to stop a man who... but then there are things I can't even tell you. All I can say is that I remonstrated.

I shan't discuss what happened after this point. I wouldn't be fair to Mr. Jackson, or to me. The other party (I haven't

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told you about her) was discussed, and it was decided that he would continue to see her in order that we might be together. I demurred at this, but after all—and I do dare say it—passion is passion!

V

From Mrs. Sarah Yates to her Mother

July 6

Well Mama, it's all over. As was expected, Alonzo got in a fight and was beaten up terribly. He broke his glasses and I gave him the new pair. Now he seems sort of calmed and resigned, and I suppose this will hold him for at least six months. I hope so. His eyes are all black, and there is a cut on his forehead, where some awful ruffian struck him. I know it was someone hired by John Kemper. He was over here bright and early on the morning of the Fourth putting up signs. Do you know what they said? I thought it was positively irreligious, and so did a lot of other people. There were a lot of ruffians over from Afton, helping John Kemper put up those signs. That was how Alonzo got in the fight. He went up to one of them on Main Street and pulled down a sign the man was putting up. Then of course the man struck Alonzo to the ground and knocked him out. However Alonzo gave his speech in the afternoon and was really inspired. The people seemed to think so too, because they cheered and cheered him. I was very proud of him.

And of course I was proud of Little Odie too. He fired the gun at exactly the right time and Mr. Schmerhorn spoke glowingly of his ability. Alonzo promised to buy him a rifle, for doing so well.

The funniest thing happened about Delphia. She's better I believe, but she certainly gave me a scare. Maybe it's like Alonzo says, she needs a man. She led her American Sir Galahad Knights in a chorus, and of course, all the mothers made over Delphia, since it was their own children doing the singing.

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But the funniest thing happened. Some minutes after the choir had left the bandstand, Delphia climbed back up on the stand. But she didn't do anything. She just stood there and looked out. Not many people were watching, but those that were saw that she was looking funny. Cora, and her young man, Harry Jackson, happened to be standing right in front of the bandstand. All of a sudden Delphia pointed her finger straight at them, and opened her mouth like she wanted to say something. But she didn't. She just stood there. Sheriff Jones was at the end of the bandstand, and he walked up and took Delphia's arm, very nicely of course. That seemed to please Delphia, and she began to talk a blue streak to the Sheriff. I was too busy to find out what was going on then, but about an hour later I asked the Sheriff.

"She wanted to know why I didn't make the announcement," he said.

"What announcement?" I asked.

"I don't have the slightest idea, Mrs. Yates," he answered.

The Sheriff doesn't know what's in Delphia's mind, and neither do I. Who does?

The young man, Harry Jackson, spoke to Alonzo last night, and it's all settled about him and Cora. No date has been set, but I guess they'll be married in the fall. He's a nice boy. You'll like him.

Alonzo just came through the dining room, complaining about his eyes and muttering about those signs. Do you know what they said Mama? All over town they were pasted on trees and fences. They were big red signs :

THEODORE ROOSEVELT WILL WALK ON
THE WATERS OF LAKE TISHIMINGO
THIS AFTERNOON
2:00 P. M.
ALL CHRISTIANS INVITED

Isn't that awful? A lot of people went to the lake, but of course, it didn't really happen. Alonzo just hollered through the house and said that if *anybody* could do it, it would be Teddy. Now we have to face Election Day!

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OF GOD

The brutes that graved on walls of rock
Patterns of their shaggy God
Knew His thunder, knew His sun,
And knew Him that He burst the buds.

God-scholars of a city age
Coded His all-thunderous ways
And proved that every shriek of pain
Streaked the skies at His design.

But particles which nothing are,
Yet wheel in intellectual curves,
Compose me now; a God-less scheme
Evolves me from a rib of slime.

I see the blasting of our sun
Graved on every blank of stone
And hear in children's streaking wails
How our despair designs His will.

—George P. Elliott

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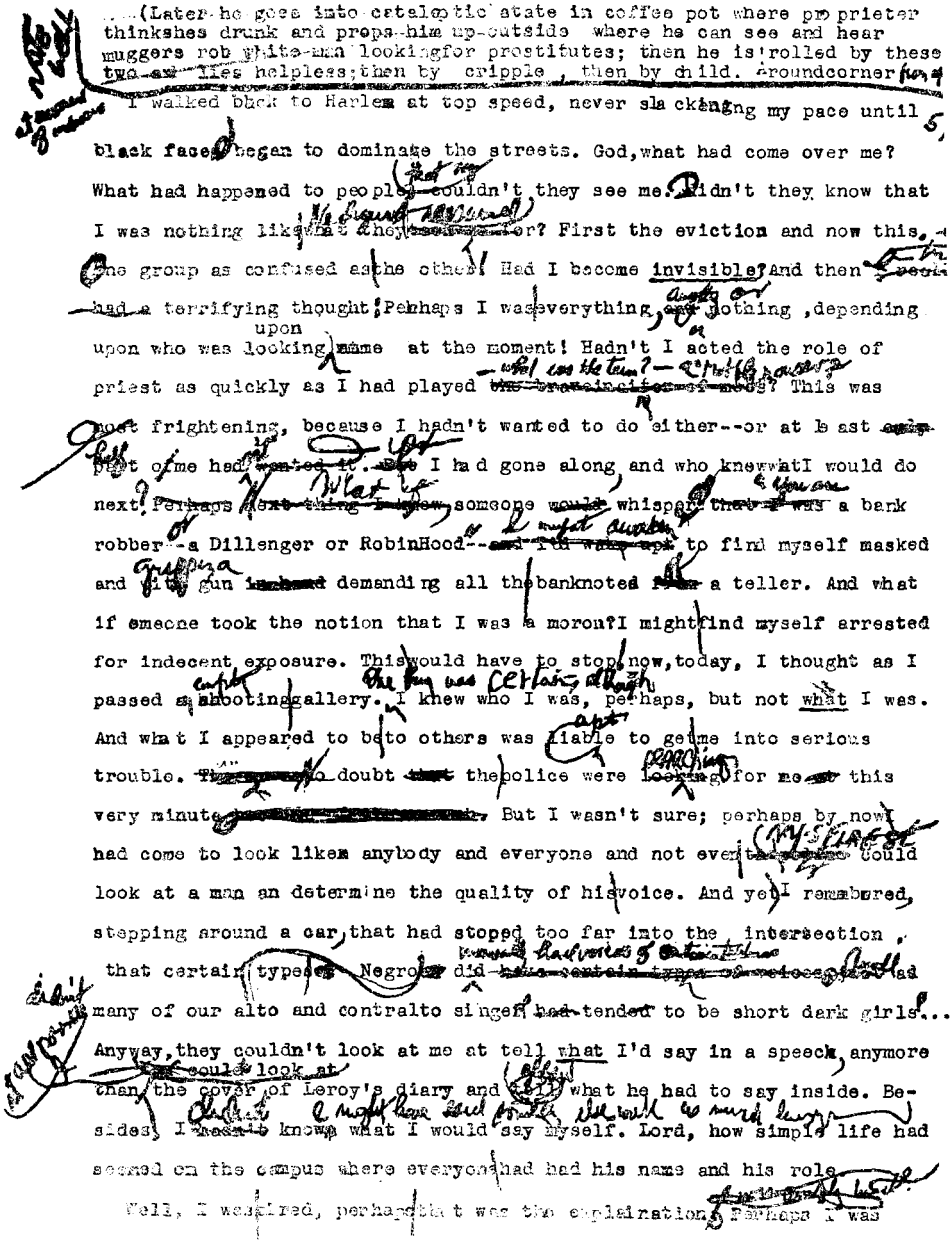

A manuscript page from Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man.

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THE ART OF FICTION VIII

RALPH ELLISON

When *Invisible Man*, Ralph Ellison's first novel, received the National Book Award for 1952, the author in his acceptance speech noted with dismay and gratification the conferring of the award to what he called "an attempt at a major novel". His gratification was understandable, so too his dismay when one considers the amount of objectivity Mr. Ellison can display toward his own work. He felt the state of U.S. fiction to be so unhappy that it was an "attempt" rather than an achievement which received the important award.

Many of us will disagree with Mr. Ellison's evaluation of his own work. Its crackling, brilliant, sometimes wild, but always controlled prose warrants this; so does the care and logic with which its form is revealed, and not least its theme: that of a young Negro who emerges from the South and—in the tradition of James' Hyacinth Robinson and Stendhal's Julien Sorel—moves into the adventure of life at large.

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In the summer of 1954, Mr. Ellison came abroad to travel and lecture. His visit ended with Paris where for a very few weeks he mingled with the American expatriate group to whom his work was known and of much interest. The day before he left he talked to us in the Café de la Mairie du VI[e] about art and the novel.

Ralph Ellison takes both art and the novel seriously. And the Café de la Mairie has a tradition of seriousness behind it, for here was written Djuna Barnes' spectacular novel, *Nightwood.* There is a tradition, too, of speech and eloquence, for Miss Barnes' hero, Dr. O'Connor, often drew a crowd of listeners to his mighty rhetoric. So here gravity is in the air and rhetoric too. While Mr. Ellison speaks, he rarely pauses, and although the strain of organizing his thought is sometimes evident, his phraseology and the quiet steady flow and development of ideas are overwhelming. To listen to him is rather like sitting in the back of a huge hall and feeling the lecturer's faraway eyes staring directly into your own. The highly emphatic, almost professorial intonations, startle with their distance, self-confidence, and warm undertones of humor.

ELLISON

Let me say right now that my book is not an autobiographical work.

INTERVIEWERS

You weren't thrown out of school like the boy in your novel?

ELLISON

No. Though, like him, I went from one job to another.

INTERVIEWERS

Why did you give up music and begin writing?

ELLISON

I didn't give up music, but I became interested in writing through incessant reading. In 1935 I discovered Eliot's *The Waste Land* which moved and intrigued me but defied my powers of analysis—such as they were—and I wondered why I had never read anything of equal intensity and sensibility by an American Negro writer. Later on, in New York, I read a poem by Richard Wright, who, as luck would have it, came

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to town the next week. He was editing a magazine called *New Challenge* and asked me to try a book review of E. Waters Turpin's *These Low Grounds*. On the basis of this review Wright suggested that I try a short story, which I did. I tried to use my knowledge of riding freight trains. He liked the story well enough to accept it and it got as far as the galley proofs when it was bumped from the issue because there was too much material. Just after that the magazine failed.

INTERVIEWERS

But you went on writing—

ELLISON

With difficulty, because this was the Recession of 1937. I went to Dayton, Ohio, where my brother and I hunted and sold game to earn a living. At night I practiced writing and studied Joyce, Dostoievski, Stein and Hemingway. Especially Hemingway; I read him to learn his sentence structure and how to organize a story. I guess many young writers were doing this, but I also used his description of hunting when I went into the fields the next day. I had been hunting since I was eleven but no one had broken down the process of wing-shooting for me and it was from reading Hemingway that I learned to lead a bird. When he describes something in print, believe him; believe him even when he describes the process of art in terms of baseball or boxing; he's been there.

INTERVIEWERS

Were you affected by the Social Realism of the period?

ELLISON

I was seeking to learn and Social Realism was a highly regarded theory, though I didn't think too much of the so-called proletarian fiction even when I was most impressed by Marxism. I was intrigued by Malraux, who at that time was being claimed by the Communists. I noticed, however, that whenever the heroes of *Man's Fate* (1) regarded their condition during moments of heightened self-consciousness, their thinking was something other than Marxist. Actually they

(1) *La Condition Humaine.*

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were more profoundly intellectual than their real-life counterparts. Of course, Malraux was more of a humanist than most of the Marxist writers of that period—and also much more of an artist. He was the artist-revolutionary rather than a politician when he wrote *Man's Fate*, and the book lives not because of a political position embraced at the time, but because of its larger concern with the tragic struggle of humanity. Most of the social realists of the period were concerned more with tragedy than with injustice. I wasn't, and am not, concerned with injustice, but with art.

INTERVIEWERS

Then you consider your novel a purely literary work as opposed to one in the tradition of social protest.

ELLISON

Now mind! I recognize no dichotomy between art and protest. Dostoievski's *Notes from Underground* is, among other things, a protest against the limitations of 19th century rationalism; *Don Quixote*, *Man's Fate*, *Oedipus Rex*, *The Trial* —all these embody protest, even against the limitation of human life itself. If social protest is antithetical to art, what then shall we make of Goya, Dickens and Twain? One hears a lot of complaints about the so-called "protest novel", especially when written by Negroes; but it seems to me that the critics could more accurately complain about their lack of craftsmanship and their provincialism.

INTERVIEWERS

But isn't it going to be difficult for the Negro writer to escape provincialism when his literature is concerned with a minority?

ELLISON

All novels are about certain minorities: the individual is a minority. The universal in the novel—and isn't that what we're all clamoring for these days?—is reached only through the depiction of the specific man in a specific circumstance.

INTERVIEWERS

But still, how is the Negro writer, in terms of what is expected of him by critics and readers, going to escape his

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particular need for social protest and reach the "universal" you speak of?

ELLISON

If the Negro, or any other writer, is going to do what is expected of him, he's lost the battle before he takes the field. I suspect that all the agony that goes into writing is borne precisely because the writer longs for acceptance—but it must be acceptance on his own terms. Perhaps, though, this thing cuts both ways: the Negro novelist draws his blackness too tightly around him when he sits down to write—that's what the anti-protest critics believe—but perhaps the white reader draws his whiteness around himself when he sits down to read. He doesn't want to identify himself with Negro characters in terms of our immediate racial and social situation, though on the deeper human level identification can become compelling when the situation is revealed artistically. The white reader doesn't want to get too close, not even in an imaginary re-creation of society. Negro writers have felt this and it has led to much of our failure.

Too many books by Negro writers are addressed to a white audience. By doing this the authors run the risk of limiting themselves to the audience's presumptions of what a Negro is or should be; the tendency is to become involved in polemics, to plead the Negro's humanity. You know, many white people question that humanity but I don't think that Negroes can afford to indulge in such a false issue. For us the question should be, what are the specific *forms* of that humanity, and what in our background is worth preserving or abandoning. The clue to this can be found in folklore which offers the first drawings of any group's character. It preserves mainly those situations which have repeated themselves again and again in the history of any given group. It describes those rites, manners, customs, and so forth, which insure the good life, or destroy it; and it describes those boundaries of feeling, thought and action which that particular group has found to be the limitation of the human condition. It projects this wisdom in symbols which express the group's will to survive; it embodies those values by which the group lives and dies. These drawings may be crude but they are nonetheless profound in that they represent the group's attempt to humanize the world. It's no accident that great literature, the products

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of individual artists, is erected upon this humble base. The hero of Dostoievski's *Notes from Underground* and the hero of Gogol's *The Overcoat* appear in their rudimentary forms far back in Russian folklore. French literature has never ceased exploring the nature of the Frenchman... Or take Picasso—

INTERVIEWERS

How does Picasso fit into all this?

ELLISON

Why, he's the greatest wrestler with forms and techniques of them all. Just the same he's never abandoned the old symbolic forms of Spanish art: the guitar, the bull, daggers, women, shawls, veils, mirrors. Such symbols serve a dual function: they allow the artist to speak of complex experiences and to annihilate time with simple lines and curves; and they allow the viewer an orientation, both emotional and associative, which goes so deep that a total culture may resound in a simple rhythm, an image. It has been said that Escudero could recapitulate the history and spirit of the Spanish dance with a simple arabesque of his fingers.

INTERVIEWERS

But these are examples from homogeneous cultures. How representative of the American nation would you say Negro folklore is?

ELLISON

The history of the American Negro is a most intimate part of American history. Through the very process of slavery came the building of the United States. Negro folklore, evolving within a larger culture which regarded it as inferior, was an especially courageous expression. It announced the Negro's willingness to trust his own experience, his own sensibilities as to the definition of reality, rather than allow his masters to define these crucial matters for him. His experience is that of America and the West, and is as rich a body of experience as one would find anywhere. We can view it narrowly as something exotic, folksy, or "low-down", or we may identify ourselves with it and recognize it as an important segment of the larger American experience—not lying at the bottom of it, but intertwined, diffused in its very

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texture. I can't take this lightly or be impressed by those who cannot see its importance; it is important to *me*. One ironic witness to the beauty and the universality of this art is the fact that the descendants of the very men who enslaved us can now sing the spirituals and find in the singing an exaltation of their own humanity. Just take a look at some of the slave songs, blues, folk ballads; their possibilities for the writer are infinitely suggestive. Some of them have named human situations so well that a whole corps of writers could not exhaust their universality. For instance, here's an old slave verse:

Ole Aunt Dinah, she's just like me
She work so hard she want to be free
But ole Aunt Dinah's gittin' kinda ole
She's afraid to go to Canada on account of the cold.

Ole Uncle Jack, now he's a mighty "good nigger"
You tell him that you want to be free for a fac'
Next thing you know they done stripped the skin off your back.

Now ole Uncle Ned, he want to be free
He found his way north by the moss on the tree
He cross that river floating in a tub
The patateroller (1) *give him a mighty close rub.*

It's crude, but in it you have three universal attitudes toward the problem of freedom. You can refine it and sketch in the psychological subtleties and historical and philosophical allusions, action and what not, but I don't think its basic definition can be exhausted. Perhaps some genius could do as much with it as Mann has done with the Joseph story.

INTERVIEWERS

Can you give us an example of the use of folklore in your own novel?

ELLISON

Well, there are certain themes, symbols and images which are based on folk material. For example, there is the old saying amongst Negroes: If you're black, stay back; if you're

(1) *Patroller.*

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brown, stick around; if you're white, you're right. And there is the joke Negroes tell on themselves about their being so black they can't be seen in the dark. In my book this sort of thing was merged with the meanings which blackness and light have long had in Western mythology: evil and goodness, ignorance and knowledge, and so on. In my novel the narrator's development is one through blackness to light; that is, from ignorance to enlightenment: invisibility to visibility. He leaves the South and goes North; this, as you will notice in reading Negro folktales, is always the road to freedom—the movement upward. You have the same thing again when he leaves his underground cave for the open.

It took me a long time to learn how to adapt such examples of myth into my work—also ritual. The use of ritual is equally a vital part of the creative process. I learned a few things from Eliot, Joyce and Hemingway, but not how to adapt them. When I started writing, I knew that in both *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses* ancient myth and ritual were used to give form and significance to the material; but it took me a few years to realize that the myths and rites which we find functioning in our everyday lives could be used in the same way. In my first attempt at a novel—which I was unable to complete—I began by trying to manipulate the simple structural unities of *beginning*, *middle* and *end*, but when I attempted to deal with the psychological strata—the images, symbols and emotional configurations—of the experience at hand, I discovered that the unities were simply cool points of stability on which one could suspend the narrative line—but beneath the surface of apparently rational human relationships there seethed a chaos before which I was helpless. People rationalize what they shun or are incapable of dealing with; these superstitions and their rationalizations become ritual as they govern behavior. The rituals become social forms, and it is one of the functions of the artist to recognize them and raise them to the level of art.

I don't know whether I'm getting this over or not. Let's put it this way: Take the "Battle Royal" passage in my novel, where the boys are blindfolded and forced to fight each other for the amusement of the white observers. This is a vital part of behavior pattern in the South, which both Negroes and whites thoughtlessly accept. It is a ritual in

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preservation of caste lines, a keeping of taboo to appease the gods and ward off bad luck. It is also the initiation ritual to which all greenhorns are subjected. This passage states what Negroes will see I did not have to invent; the patterns were already there in society so that all I had to do was present them in a broader context of meaning. In any society there are many rituals of situation which, for the most part, go unquestioned. They can be simple or elaborate, but they are the connective tissue between the work of art and the audience.

INTERVIEWERS

Do you think a reader unacquainted with this folklore can properly understand your work?

ELLISON

Yes, I think so. It's like jazz; there's no inherent problem which prohibits understanding but the assumptions brought to it. We don't all dig Shakespeare uniformly, or even *Little Red Riding Hood.* The understanding of art depends finally upon one's willingness to extend one's humanity and one's knowlege of human life. I noticed, incidentally, that the Germans, having no special caste assumptions concerning American Negroes, dealt with my work simply as a novel. I think the Americans will come to view it that way in twenty years—if it's around that long.

INTERVIEWERS

Don't you think it will be?

ELLISON

I doubt it. It's not an important novel. I failed of eloquence and many of the immediate issues are rapidly fading away. If it does last, it will be simply because there are things going on in its depth that are of more permanent interest than on its surface. I hope so, anyway.

INTERVIEWERS

Have the critics given you any constructive help in your writing, or changed in any way your aims in fiction?

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ELLISON

No, except that I have a better idea of how the critics react, of what they see and fail to see, of how their sense of life differs with mine and mine with theirs. In some instances they were nice for the wrong reasons. In the U.S.—and I don't want this to sound like an apology for my own failures—some reviewers did not see what was before them because of this nonsense about protest.

INTERVIEWERS

Did the critics change your view of yourself as a writer?

ELLISON

I can't say that they did. I've been seeing by my own candle too long for that. The critics did give me a sharper sense of a larger audience, yes; and some convinced me that they were willing to judge me in terms of my writing rather than in terms of my racial identity. But there is one widely syndicated critical bankrupt who made liberal noises during the Thirties and has been frightened ever since. He attacked my book as a "literary race riot." By and large, the critics and readers gave me an affirmed sense of my identity as a writer. You might know this within yourself, but to have it affirmed by others is of utmost importance. Writing is, after all, a form of communication.

INTERVIEWERS

When did you begin *Invisible Man*?

ELLISON

In the summer of 1945. I had returned from the sea, ill, with advice to get some rest. Part of my illness was due, no doubt, to the fact that I had not been able to write a novel for which I'd received a Rosenwald fellowship the previous winter. So on a farm in Vermont where I was reading *The Hero* by Lord Ragland and speculating on the nature of Negro leadership in the U.S., I wrote the first paragraph of *Invisible Man*, and was soon involved in the struggle of creating the novel.

INTERVIEWERS

How long did it take you to write it?

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ELLISON

Five years with one year out for a short novel which was unsatisfactory, ill-concieved and never submitted for publication.

INTERVIEWERS

Did you have everything thought out before you began to write *Invisible Man*?

ELLISON

The symbols and their connections were known to me. I began it with a chart of the three-part division. It was a conceptual frame with most of the ideas and some incidents indicated. The three parts represent the narrator's movement from, using Kenneth Burke's terms, purpose to passion to perception. These three major sections are built up of smaller units of three which mark the course of the action and which depend for their development upon what I hoped was a consistent and developing motivation. However, you'll note that the maximum insight on the hero's part isn't reached until the final section. After all, it's a novel about innocence and human error, a struggle through illusion to reality. Each section begins with a sheet of paper; each piece of paper is exchanged for another and contains a definition of his identity, or the social role he is to play as defined for him by others. But all say essentially the same thing, "Keep this nigger boy running". Before he could have some voice in his own destiny he had to discard these old identities and illusions; his enlightenment couldn't come until then. Once he recognizes the hole of darkness into which these papers put him, he has to burn them. That's the plan and the intention; whether I achieved this is something else.

INTERVIEWERS

Would you say that the search for identity is primarily an American theme?

ELLISON

It is *the* American theme. The nature of our society is such that we are prevented from knowing who we are. It is still a young society, and this is an integral part of its development.

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INTERVIEWERS

A common criticism of "first novels" is that the central incident is either omitted or weak. *Invisible Man* seems to suffer here; shouldn't we have been present at the scenes which are the dividing lines in the book—namely, when the Brotherhood organization moves the narrator downtown, then back uptown?

ELLISON

I think you missed the point. The major flaw in the hero's character is his unquestioning willingness to do what is required of him by others as a way to success, and this was the specific form of his "innocence". He goes where he is told to go; he does what he is told to do; he does not even choose his Brotherhood name. It is chosen for him and he accepts it. He has accepted party discipline and thus cannot be present at the scene since it is not the will of the Brotherhood leaders. What is important is not the scene but his failure to question their decision. There is also the fact that no single person can be everywhere at once, nor can a single consciousness be aware of all the nuances of a large social action. What happens uptown while he is downtown is part of his darkness, both symbolic and actual. No; I don't feel that any vital scenes have been left out.

INTERVIEWERS

Why did you find it necessary to shift styles throughout the book; particularly in the Prologue and Epilogue?

ELLISON

The Prologue was written afterwards, really—in terms of a shift in the hero's point of view. I wanted to throw the reader off balance—make him accept certain non-naturalistic effects. It was really a memoir written underground, and I wanted a foreshadowing through which I hoped the reader would view the actions which took place in the main body of the book. For another thing, the styles of life presented are different. In the South where he was trying to fit into a traditional pattern and where his sense of certainty had not yet been challenged, I felt a more naturalistic treatment was adequate. The college Trustee's speech to the students is really an echo of a certain kind of southern rhetoric and I

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enjoyed trying to recreate it. As the hero passes from the South to the North, from the relatively stable to the swiftly changing, his sense of certainty is lost and the style becomes expressionistic. Later on during his fall from grace in the Brotherhood it becomes somewhat surrealistic. The styles try to express both his state of consciousness and the state of society. The Epilogue was necessary to complete the action begun when he set out to write his memoirs.

INTERVIEWERS

After four hundred pages you still felt the Epilogue was necessary?

ELLISON

Yes. Look at it this way. The book is a series of reversals. It is the portrait of the artist as a rabble-rouser, thus the various mediums of expression. In the Epilogue the hero discovers what he had not discovered throughout the book: you have to make your own decisions; you have to think for yourself. The hero comes up from underground because the act of writing and thinking necessitated it. He could not stay down there.

INTERVIEWERS

You say that the book is "a series of reversals". It seemed to us that this was a weakness, that it was built on a series of provocative situations which were cancelled by the calling up of conventional emotions—.

ELLISON

I don't quite see what you mean.

INTERVIEWERS

Well, for one thing, you begin with a provocative situation of the American Negro's status in society. The responsibility for this is that of the white American citizen; that's where the guilt lies. Then you cancel it by introducing the Communist Party, or the Brotherhood, so that the reader tends to say to himself: "Ah, they're the guilty ones. They're the ones who mistreat him; not us."

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ELLISON

I think that's a case of misreading. And I didn't identify the Brotherhood as the C. P., but since you do I'll remind you that they too are white. The hero's invisibility is not a matter of being seen, but a refusal to run the risk of his own humanity, which involves guilt. This is not an attack upon white society! It is what the hero refuses to do in each section which leads to further action. He must assert and achieve his own humanity; he cannot run with the pack and do this—this is the reason for all the reversals. The Epilogue is the most final reversal of all; therefore it is a necessary statement.

INTERVIEWERS

And the love affairs—or almost-love-affairs—.

ELLISON

(Laughing) I'm glad you put it that way. The point is that when thrown into a situation which he thinks he wants, the hero is sometimes thrown at a loss; he doesn't know how to act. After he had made this speech about The Place of the Woman in Our Society, for example, and was approached by one of the women in the audience, he thought she wanted to talk about the Brotherhood and found that she wanted to talk about brother-*and-sisterhood.* Look, didn't you find the book at all *funny*? I felt that such a man as this character would have been incapable of a love affair; it would have been inconsistent with his personality.

INTERVIEWERS

Do you have any difficulty controlling your characters? E. M. Forster says that he sometimes finds a character running away with him.

ELLISON

No, because I find that a sense of the ritual understructure of the fiction helps to guide the creation of characters. Action is the thing. We are what we do and do not do. The problem for me is to get from A to B to C. My anxiety about transitions greatly prolonged the writing of my book. The naturalists stick to case histories and sociology and are willing to compete with the camera and the tape recorder. I despise

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concreteness in writing, but when reality is deranged in fiction, one must worry about the seams.

INTERVIEWERS

Do you have difficulty turning real characters into fiction?

ELLISON

Real characters are just a limitation. It's like turning your own life into fiction: you have to be hindered by chronology and fact. A number of the characters just jumped out, like Rinehart and Ras.

INTERVIEWERS

Isn't Ras based on Marcus Garvey (1)?

ELLISON

No. In 1950 my wife and I were staying at a vacation spot where we met some white liberals who thought the best way to be friendly was to tell us what it was like to be Negro. I got mad at hearing this from people who otherwise seemed very intelligent. I had already sketched Ras but the passion of his statement came out after I went upstairs that night feeling that we needed to have this thing out once and for all and get it done with; then we could go on living like people and individuals. No conscious reference to Garvey is intended.

INTERVIEWERS

What about Rinehart? Is he related to Rinehart in the blues tradition, or Django Rheinhardt, the jazz musician?

ELLISON

There is a peculiar set of circumstances connected with my choice of that name. My old Oklahoma friend, Jimmy Rushing, the blues singer, used to sing one with a refrain that went:

Rinehart, Rinehart,
It's so lonesome up here
On Beacon Hill,

which haunted me, and as I was thinking of a character who was a master of disguise, of coincidence, this name with its

(1) *Marcus Garvey - Negro nationalist and founder of a "Back to Africa" movement in the U. S. during the early* 1900's.

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suggestion of inner and outer came to my mind. Later I learned that it was a call used by Harvard students when they prepared to riot, a call to chaos. Which is very interesting because it is not long after Rinehart appears in my novel that the riot breaks out in Harlem. Rinehart is my name for the personification of chaos. He is also intended to represent America and change. He has lived so long with chaos that he knows how to manipulate it. It is the old theme of *The Confidence Man*. He is a figure in a country with no solid past or stable class lines; therefore he is able to move about easily from one to the other. *(He pauses, thoughtfully).*

You know, I'm still thinking of your question about the use of Negro experience as material for fiction. One function of serious literature is to deal with the moral core of a given society. Well, in the United States the Negro and his status have always stood for that moral concern. He symbolizes among other things the human and social possibility of equality. This is the moral question raised in our two great 19th century novels, *Moby Dick* and *Huckleberry Finn*. The very center of Twain's book revolves finally around the boy's relations with Nigger Jim and the question of what Huck should do about getting Jim free after the two scoundrels had sold him. There is a magic here worth conjuring, and that reaches to the very nerve of the American consciousness—so why should I abandon it? Our so-called race problem has now lined up with the world problems of colonialism and the struggle of the West to gain the allegiance of the remaining non-white people who have thus far remained outside the Communist sphere; thus its possibilities for art have increased rather than lessened. Looking at the novelist as manipulator and depictor of moral problems I ask myself how much of the achievement of democratic ideals in the U. S. has been affected by the steady pressure of Negroes and those whites who were sensitive to the implications of our condition; and I know that without that pressure the position of our country before the world would be much more serious than it is even now. Here is part of the social dynamics of a great society. Perhaps the discomfort about protest in books by Negro authors comes because since the 19th century American literature has avoided profound moral searching. It was too painful and besides there were specific problems of language

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and form to which the writers could address themselves. They did wonderful things, but perhaps they left the real problems untouched. There are exceptions, of course, like Faulkner who has been working the great moral theme all along, taking it up where Mark Twain put it down.

I feel that with my decision to devote myself to the novel I took on one of the responsibilities inherited by those who practice the craft in the U. S.: that of describing for all that fragment of the huge diverse American experience which I know best, and which offers me the possibility of contributing not only to the growth of the literature but to the shaping of the culture as I should like it to be. The American novel is in this sense a conquest of the frontier; as it describes our experience, it creates it.

—Alfred Chester
Vilma Howard

(The Ellison interview is the eighth in a series on the Art of Fiction. Authors interviewed have included E. M. Forster, François Mauriac, Graham Greene, Irwin Shaw, William Styron, Alberto Moravia, and Joyce Cary. Future interviews include those with Ernest Hemingway, Georges Simenon, André Malraux, and others.)

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ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE

Chased down, and baited for the kill,
  And naked to men's eyes,
I struggled blindly a great while
  And bared my teeth with lies.

Yet civil fury made small show;
  Men did not scourge nor spit;
And some few chafed their hands to draw
  My body from the pit.
And some few brought me proofs enough
  That faith and love remain.
Yet all the stones are not so rough
  As I am rough with pain.

That I, who could with Timon's voice
  Have bitten through the grave,
Stand leashed and dumb, deprived of choice,
  Being Compassion's slave.

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PENNIES FOR CHARON

I looked for rest, though without love,
Since I had found a course to run
Deep as a river in its groove
And strong, like the consuming sun.

This was a quick and straitening path,
Cold, unshadowed. Yet I had stood
So much in heat that lust and wrath
Made the veins bristle with their blood.

Faced with such dense enduring cold
As cramps them now. And I was lost,
Suddenly; hungered to be told.
But none spoke then, nor on this coast.

Where many wait, as for a word,
Silent, lips, brows, wrought to stiff calm.
Are commands given, but none heard?
No wrist strikes tinder to the drum.

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Feliks Topolski

Born in Poland in 1907, son of the actor Edward Topolski, educated at the Warsaw Academy of Art, then self-tutored in Italy and in Paris before settling in England in 1935, Feliks Topolski is an incredibly prolific artist in every field. One of the official British War Artists, and commissioned by the Crown to picture the Coronation ceremonies, his paintings hang in galleries the world over. Bernard Shaw was enchanted by his drawings, and for him Topolski illustrated *Pygmalion*, *Geneva*, and *In Good King Charles' Golden Days*. Murals in Singapore, theatrical designs for London, on-the-scene pictorial reporting for *Life*, *Fortune*, *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*, a book of studies of Mahatma Gandhi, a book of portraits of Shaw—Topolski is deeply absorbed in the moment, with the great figures and with the pulsating life of the street as well. An inveterate world traveler, with enthusiasm and hummingbird quickness he fills innumerable notebooks with his tense, trenchant sketches, the best of which he publishes in a twice-monthly folio broadside called *Topolski's Chronicle* published from his atelier at 14 Hanover Terrace in London.

E. W.

Opposite: *Head of an Indian*; in pages following: *Macao, an English hunt, a parade in Delhi, the Coronation.*

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JOSEPH LANGLAND

THE COBRA

The hooded cobra floating over the leaves
indescribably deceives,
flicking his delicate forked tongue in rings
above bent mosses where his body swings
in powerful convolutions. The scaly scarp
or his flat diamond head forswears his sharp
flickering pointed eyes
relaying all surprise
through coiling coils to his mouth's elastic sheath
tissued over his venomed teeth.

Who made the hooded cobra king,
acknowledging the purple of his sting?
His jeweled hood insures compulsive thrones
crowning the dusty stones;
gliding through moulds of spotted shade and dew
his body makes a shining retinue.
Jehovah, Allah, wherefore have you sung
if by this passioned watcher we may still be stung?

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I saw a scheming beggar of the sword
surprise one into death, his overlord,
and after the precise attack
produce the silken sac;
that twitching length of lust
tumbled upon the smoking dust,
an awful rod
for anyone to prove the flowering of his god.

Yet in the sleep that followed after fear
I saw the sheer
sharp curves and striking shape resolved
toward luminous light, the nest of coils dissolved
into a birdlike body; the proud head-thrust
rose to its kingly grace from bleaching dust;
white feathers crept
along the elongated neck, then swept
downily over the changing eyes. I saw dust break
into a dew, and then a lake,
and where the dark tormentor once had gone
rode a triumphant swan.

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ZYGMUNT HAUPT

TIERRA DEL FUEGO

NOW I walk back to the Manor House, on the path which runs back of peasant yards and barns, along the quite well-trodden path where everybody walks to avoid the mud of the main road. You have to be careful, for there the village people also go, to defecate in the open; there the village lovers meet at twilight, or in the evening; there a thief sneaks by with a sack of oats from the manor house storage where it was handed to him secretly by the estate's worker; the village murderer blindly runs this way, wiping his knife, roughly made out of a scythe blade, on the skirts of his sheepskin coat; there prances a calf, run away from the yard; this way behind the peasant huts a path leads to the church; this way the village maids in their short and stiff petticoats go home with their kerchiefs tied crosswise on their breasts; this way they guide the emissary of the Ukrainian underground organization, a city man with thin trench coat and muddied city shoes; there the policemen patrol in twos with their fixed bayonets, and their dog, a trained Alsatian, tugging at his leash. There goes limping Pawe, the gardechasse, to hire "lads" for the battue; and the wife of the petty Jewish middleman, Judka, she is splashed with mud and hurrying to her hungry and multitudinous children; there goes the marauding tomcat after field mice; there ghosts haunt the way after midnight; there the ravens gather; there the sun in a melancholic way is reflected in the puddles from under the heavy bags of clouds. Lord! how dreadful and close and far away is this Corso, promenade, "la salle des pas perdus", in the county of Rawa, on one side fields, boundary strips, ditches,

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and the undulations of flat hills and moist meadows running down to the water, on the other side the thatched roofs of the cottages blackened with moisture, pear trees with their leaves shivering like the leaves of aspen trees, beech trees round the Uniate church, dunghills of the farmyards, and the road along the fences and commons with its puddles and the clods of mud mirrored in its oceans like the rocks of Cape Horn.

Back in my room, the birch logs in the stove are crackling, in the chinks of the cast-iron door of the stove I can see the turbulent flames. Many times the cracks in the mortar of the stove have been plastered anew, and again they chipped away, the warmth sieves through and radiates from it, something explodes in the fire and makes the wooden furniture in the room creak. The black window looks into the winter garden and I make out the foreign tree which grows in front of my window, foreign and indiscreet like a voyager from strange, far-away lands, observing critically how these Hyperboreans are living in here, such a long, gaunt trunk, and even now in winter there are hanging from its branches some kind of siliquas like the braids of some foreign devil's wig.

My room is the schoolroom of the manor house, and, as I came for the Christmas holidays, they put in a bed for me, without disturbing the chronic atmosphere of the interior. Along the walls are glass-paned bookcases, locked with a keylatch (in the same way, following some seventeenth century custom, they are locking up the sugar in the sugar-bowl, for in those times the "kanar" was expensive and rare, and now it is the cheapest of commodities.) So the bookcases are locked, and through the glass panes I can see the backs of the books, *Bibliotheque rouge*, with short stories for little girls, of course Verne's *The Adventures of the Brig Chancellor* and *Among the Tribes of Boukhara*, Daudet's *Monsieur le sous-préfet aux champs*, Guy de Maupassant's *Contes choisies, édition pour la jeunesse*, Anatole France's *L'Etui de nacre*, Eucken's *The Story of Philosophy*, Le *Petit Larousse*, an album of Polish paintings, *Petite Illustration*, *Le Temps*, *Lettres de Mademoiselle de l'Epinasse* and *The Life of Mikoaj Srebrempisany*, Spausta's *On Trails*, and what

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else, odds and ends, nicely dustjacketed in packing paper and the titles done in ink, authors, and numbers; and to this place pursues me with its slow pace, its steady crawl, the bibliobookish-paper-pulpy larva, chewing and gnawing, its muzzle dripping with pulpy saliva, its jaws milling paper into chaff and sawdust; it drills and cuts across my brain, that rustling pulpy world which has messed and crumpled this other world until I am stupified, not knowing in which world I am.

The manor house was rebuilt after the conflagration of the war under the supervision of an architect from Zamosc, a drunkard, his hands trembled, look, this way! they trembled in some advanced state of Korsakow disease or delirium, he could hardly hold a pencil in his fingers, but the attic and pediment and the columns of the porch elegantly and finely kept their style, though the interior was quite a patchwork, it cannot be denied. These were no times for grandiose expenses, so the village joiner and potter whittled and plastered in their own way and the interior was very rough and primitive indeed and that is why the floor was bare and raw and full of knots and knags.

So, holding my hands deep in my pockets I pace my room and I learn these knots by heart, let them stay upon my soul, let them not perish—mechanically I reach for a cigarette and I light it over the glass cylinder of the kerosene lamp, and it is strange, this first drag, and I am alone, spied upon through the black window by the strange, saliquous, foreign tree.

***

It was already very cold and it had snowed, as often happens, just before Christmas Eve. Not much, just to brighten the December days which were short as the blink of an eye. The events of the Christmas time and after went in their wellworn routine. We were drinking vodka in the dining room, eating Christmas delicatessen; we arranged an amateur theater; behind the windows you could see the park powdered with this snow which had fallen before Christmas. Later it

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thawed and we waited for the new snow. Outside the kitchen on a tree branch a boar killed by the shooting party hung by his hind legs, and the gluttonous magpies collected in his neighborhood. The dachshunds, thrown out of their permanent siesta by the presence of the unusual throng of guests, toddled, dissatisfied, from room to room.

Just before our departure for shooting, we drew lots for our stands; in one hat there were lots with our names, in the other the numbers of the stands. Then, one after another, came the carts drawn by working horses fattened on potato pressings from the distillery; they were paunchy from these pressings and steaming in the cold morning, the carts were ordinary working carts; they only put some straw on the bottom for seats and they took off one side of the box so that it was possible to sit sideways and hang our legs freely to the ground. It was very primitive, improvised, and it had its style.

The air smelt of winter, but it smelt also of autumn, of rotting leaves and stalks slippery with moisture, it smelt of the smoke of the peasant huts, of grey-bluish mist, of straw, of the winter insulation of the huts made of threshed bean stalks, of the beets which were earthed behind the barns, of cows' dung, of coke from the smithy, of shavings from the cartwright's workshop, of dirty hen coops, of milk which was centrifugated at the dairy, of dogs sniffing at the horses' fetlocks, of the stubblefields, of the leather guncases, of mounding fungi in the grass in the park, of fermenting haystacks, of sweating farmhands and the dirty petticoats of the working girls, and the perfume, so-called "cuire de Russe" and masculine, of the ladies of the house, of the eau de cologne of freshly-shaven gentlemen, of the old furniture stored in the attic and of the spirits in the alcohol burners of the lamps.

This is a wintery day, but mild and cool. Of the first snow which fell just before Christmas there is no trace, and everybody is waiting for the new snowfall. And now it is indescribable, this is no winter nor autumn; it seems that time has paused and hesitates and there is wild joy from this stop of time. The sky overhead is pearly, veiled with clouds of

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lavendar color, and one feels the blue showing through it. But as it is winter, the sun is somewhere close to the horizon, so there is not much light, just enough to make it cheerful and gay. The occasion merits a glass of vodka, poured out of the thick carafe, and vodka tastes strangely after the coffee with milk and buttered buns, not to mention some sliced fatty ham which follows.

How close to the earth we are, fresh from the warm comfort of the manor house, when the wheels of the cart turn slowly, kneading the solid, dense pastry of mud, and there are clods of mud falling from the rims, and the hooves of the horses splash in the puddles, covering the tweed of my overcoat with tiny drops of mud. We sit on the bottom of the box cart, our feet balancing a yard from the ground, sitting sideways toward the front. The driver, a farmhand, has his belt over a jacket of material now so threadbare that it is difficult to guess what color it used to be. He kneels in the front of the cart, his hands, red from the wind, holding the knotty rope reins, and in front of him I can see the haunches of the mares. Their hooves free themselves from the pastry of the road in their forced canter, and after a while they are slowing back to a steady pace and the cart lists to one side in a puddle.

Further on there is sand, sand heavy with moisture. On one side there are a few sunflower stalks and further on still is a furrowed field, further an undrained meadow and long stretched peasant fields. On some of them are heaps of dung like enormous molehills. Further away the streak of the Poldebiecki forests.

Now here is the forest. It is obvious at once how different we are and not of the same dimension, we are supposed to brush shoulders with this forest and with this wilderness, we are supposed to know all the paths and roads but this is not enough. Now when we leave our carts and pace to and fro we are as if of different material, patched on the background of the woods. Sometimes it seems to me that our presence here is vulgar and indecent and obscene, like lice in a garment. And it would seem so easy to adhere to it, to conform, that

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this is a question of understanding only. Understanding what? The heaving slant trunk of a tree, last year's leaves holding desperately to the knotty branches since the first snow failed to dislodge them, and golden and red they are twisted and screwed like burned tissue paper, fragile like soot and ashes. It seems as if you hear the sigh of the open forest puddle, stagnant with black forest water, and this water is different from the waters along which lies human life. It seems that to look over, to peer along the brushwood is the same as to look over the curtains decorating one's own house, but this is not true. Let's not pretend that we understand, let's not pretend that we are keen bird-watchers when we see the little forest birds busy between the wiry, sticky branches, silent and quiet, silent because they are timid at our vulgarity in the midst of this wilderness; let's not pretend to be nature lovers of all derivations; what we will invent on this theme is only what we have patched together in the familiar small and cosiness and narrowness of our life among human beings.

But still it is nice as it is, and a little farther on there are tall grass blades and there is a midget spruce greening darkly and farther still there is a whole clump of them, and farther there is lavendar and gold and orange in the vista of some forest road whence comes to us the fragrance of wilderness and woods.

Thus it is when we leave our carts, tall and small, fat and gaunt; there is young Turzanski, lean and handsome; he has a splendid tweed jacket with special sockets on the sleeve in which are set brass rounds of ammunition for his repeating gun; there is Pan Grąbowski, a forester from Wôlka; he has walrus mustachios of straw-color and he is self-conscious and serious as befits the mayor of the community of Wôlka; there is the smart and fashionable Pan Romer from Wierzbica; Pan Mormoross, gaunt and tall, with his long Purdys shot-gun; Inspector Naleski from the Frontier Guard, handsome with his shortcropped moustache, looking well in his military uniform; his rank in the Frontier Guard corresponds to colonel in the Army: he had been a Legionnaire officier of lower rank but when he was attached to the Frontier Corps they

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promoted him; Pan Czajkowski from Priztulôw, with his aquiline but quite rosy nose; Prince Saphieha from Lubycza; and Pan Tym, guest of Monsignor Waleski, a peculiar type, supposedly a Russian émigré, a strange symbiosis of Orthodox Greek, rather foxy, with the Catholic priest Pan Kiziek from Pawez, a young graduate from the agricultural college in Dublany; Monsignor Waleski—but he will not shoot, of course—as well as the young ladies.

In the open, the light was quite scattered; here in the forest where there is no shadow, everything is interwoven like the design of some material. It is difficult to estimate distances; here the birch tree, peeling in its horizontal stripes; the midget pine trees planted in rows—they are getting smaller down the vista, but it seems unimportant; the solid, juicy shadows under the trees; the dessicated grass blades rubbing each other; suddenly there is the distinctive fresh cut of an axe on the dark bark of a tree, fresh and white where someone has cut off the branch, but who? when? In the clearing, there are nicely stacked rectangles of fallen trees properly sawn, the solid workmanship of the lumberjacks, nearby heaps of branches tidily stacked and pegged to the ground. They tell us that we are going to the stands of the first drive; they instruct us: the rule is, the first shot not at the hare. Everything is perfect, smoothly organized, the stands are marked by wooden shingles on which the number of the sportsman is clumsily written in chalk by the garde-chasse. I have before me the dainty forest meadow open in all directions, I am pumping under the barrel of my Browning automatic gun five cardboard rounds and pushing the safety button. Only, by some ill luck, I have got as a companion the Monsignor.

With your thought it is like a spiral. It starts in the center and unwinds itself and whirls away.

The Monsignor is puffing and he is the color of a tomato but happy. The others have got young ladies as kibitzers and I have to amuse a priest. What to talk about with him? I almost commenced on the theme of papal encyclique but the Monsignor says, very matter of fact: "And what

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about the boars—you feed them by hand with beets, don't you, and you have them marked with numbers in here, what?" What is this "you have"? and besides the boars are only trespassing in here from Rata of Dzieduszycki and there they feed them by hand and stamp them with numbers.

A hare skipped along and sat in front of us and pricked up his ears. And at this moment, far away, the battue started, sparingly hooting and striking their sticks on the brushwood as if on a zylophone. Then there were two shots, one after another. Our hare started and leisurely skipped into the brushwood on our left. Monsignor cocked his ears and said, "That was Mormoross and at the hare..." The air is thin and glassy.

And suddenly I think, it occurs to me to bend my knees here on the moss of the ground, to kiss Monsignor's hand, the hand stroking with satisfaction the sealskin lapels of his fur coat, how easy it would be, yet not because it would be easy but because it would bring relief that this mountainous world, this chaotic world would stop at the circle drawn round with the sacred chalk of absolution and as before would turn back and retreat to the church porch—yes? Just to be contradictory, exactly because we are here, because of the fat abbé, exactly because it wouldn't fit in with indifferent, solid, brazen nature, ungodly, separated, aloof—to do something contrary, contrary to myself, when I think of the midget hunchbacked, snuff-covered Schopenhauer, mean, stingy, querulous, what? pedantic, arguing with his landlady, caustic; Schopenhauer was able to keep himself apart differently from all others—so contrary to all pessimisms, voltarians, "besser-wissers" and troubles, to surrender—so what? Shall I get into it, fall into line, into the order, conform with the order, taught, regulated even if doubtful, am I to call for grace, bend my back under the flails of my own thought, to fall into this rhythm? really to do it? to kneel here on the last year's fallen leaves and slippery pine needles, penitent, repentant, an atonement seeker, haircloth wearer, to dope myself once more, is it this? would it be enough? will I step into the godly stirrup, will I bend my soul like a bow into

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one rigid, curved, and solitary arch, whose ecstatically vibrating cord will send my prayers like arrows into the darkness, into the void which supposedly is God?

In front of us, between the sticks of brushwood we can distinguish the approaching drivers, they are in twos and threes instead of fanning out separately, and Pawel, the gardechasse, curses them in a subdued voice. I breathe with relief and the Monsignor is looking for a new, more interesting companion for the next drive and in the second drive I am left alone.

My new stand is in front of the dense nursery of young spruces; between the little trees the ground is like a drawingroom, so clean and orderly, strewn with their fallen needles. And suddenly on this clean drawing room floor stalked a fox and looked at me wisely with his triangular foxy face but he was also surprised. Still, he cooled quicker than I, and when he pirouetted round on his hind heels I shot at him once, a second time, too short! and once more and more and more and again short, the needles rained down and he was gone and that was the last of him—maybe all this was a kind of hallucination.

In the third drive I have Theresa for my companion. She says to me, old Theresa, "Zyziu, on our second stand I was to your right and you showered us with shots." "Theresa," I say, "upon my soul, that is impossible, I was shooting to the front, that is impossible," and I feel sorry because good, kind Theresa doesn't believe me, I say to her, I repeat, "It was to the front..."

The last drive was in the open, but it was already twilight and when in the end they called us to the campfire it was completely dark. From the cauldron with the traditional meat and cabbage stew, steam puffed into the cold air and it smelled of cabbage from underneath the lid. We drank vodka, it turned our heads at once till tears stood in our eyes. The small boys from the battues in their too-big top boots, their belts over their fathers' coats, were wiping their running

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noses with zeal on the sleeves of their coats and they stood in the throng, gazing at how the "gentlefolk" were drinking their vodka. Sometimes one of them bent down to pick up the cardboard of a shell discharged from a shotgun.

How regretful we are to leave the wood which now is flooded with the blue, dark-blue twilight as if with ink from an overturned inkstand. It seems that it is not we who depart, but the forest which retires into the distance, and walks away. Black trees, petrified and bold, tread back, hiding behind the others, and these too tread back with their heavy, silent tread, there falls between them and us one curtain, rusty, another one, purple, the third one, bluish gray, and them there is between us a distance, space, vacuum. I look back once more and once more these columns and phalanx are changing their order; sometimes there towers up a standard of old trees; the fusilliers' rearguard of brushwood and clearings scatters at its flanks, and now there is the open field, the deserted battleground, no man's triumph; there glitters only from time to time a puddle between the furrows, cold and silvery like the blade of an abandoned sword, once and again.

Back at home, a turmoil, the mix-up before the ball. Why, this is the last minute and there are so many things to be done! They scatter on the floors finely cut candle pieces, from the kredensroom they carry alcohol lamps with freshly cleaned wicks, they mix cocktails and distribute them in carafes and decanters; you can smell the pine branches which decorate the cornices of the big hall; the young ladies are hectic because the hired musicians of the band from Rawa are thronging in there by the tradesmen's door, and they see in the porch entrance the colors of evening dress uniforms, the officers of the Sixth Mounted Rifles from Zôolkiew who had arrived by the same train; other early guests are coming, I have on a tail-coat borrowed from my host and it pinches me at the armpits and is a little old-fashioned. The young ladies are still flapperish and excited and uttering sillinesses—"Our linden tree is the one under which Napoleon *would have sat* if he had been going this way to Moscow in 1812"—and

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there in the driveway is a country buggy or a sport Fiat car or an ancient landau; the guests are peeled out from underneath their overcoats, jackets, furs, all taken off by the butler Benedict, "Benedyk"; his brother is a manor's cupper and Benedyk for receptions puts on a pair of white cotton gloves. And in 1918, during the short stay of the Ukrainian Republic in these environs, he was the President of the local Ukrainian Committee and distributed to their Honors scanty rations of buckwheat flour when they were interned in their own manor; but after the war everything was forgotten, and both parties would consider it improper and shocking to remind each other of these halcyon days of the Ukrainians.

There is Pan Przegalski from Koscielec, a causeur, a Parisian; he doesn't pronounce his r's; for the shooting party he had his pair of splendid Holland and Holland shotguns; he talks about the aristocratic Prince Albert Radziwill—"Aba"—and he is balancing between the country gentry and the aristocracy, and these are quite different species; let's take the first: they are quite antisemitic and the others are quite philosemitic because they marry rich Jewesses—and here at the ball are the Jewish Baron Watt's daughters and in the corridor at the entrance to the host's study is waiting his Jewish middleman in a long Orthodox Jewish cassock; he has been waiting since this very morning and patiently says, "I will wait," and suddenly the band strikes up the first country dance and the window panes tremble with it.

From the ball room through the sounds of music and the hum of voices you can hear the shouting of young Jôzio Haden, the *arrangeur*: "Gentlemen... rrrrrond!....." till the grain showers down from the traditional dry harvest garlands in the hall; beside me I hear old Pan Wyzewski recounting: "the Archduke and his cortege of officers arrive at Sacher's in Vienna, in broad daylight, and the Archduke is stark naked, he has only his sword at his side and his shako on his head, and the officers at the tables spring up to attention and salute..." and this morning, in front of the manor porch stood a few men, so-called "travellers"—and travellers in these times were young men who

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hadn't yet in their lives had a chance to work, who walked and tramped from village to village and stood before the porches, nothing humble in them, nothing of pushing forward, they just stood up, even quite decently clad, only sprinkled with mud—and so it was day after day, such kind of message, a memento of the times—they stood up, to go away afterwards, horizon seekers, automatons and freaks of an economic teratology, and they stood nonchalantly and looked with their matter-of-fact gaze at the manor; and the squire was irritated, reaching for his portmonnais and saying, irritated, to his wife: "all the time this portmonnais and portmonnais" and let's understand him, because he is overdue several months with his Saturday payments, and besides he received this very morning a summons from a quarrelsome neighbor who had disputed his boundaries, for shooting foxes on the squire's own ground.

Jôzio Haden: "Mesdames—Bouquet!" and you can see through the open door of the ballroom the women's bare arms and shoulders laid on the men's chests in the dance, they seem embracing, they seem pushing away, and the peasant girl in her tight necklace of beads turning round with the tray of cold drinks; and the young Turzanski, about whom they say that his father had a drugstore and made money and the young one has already the style and bearing of the born gentleman and he is the first personage in the county; and Pan Rfalowicz from Uluôwek is of an old Armenian-Polish family of squires, but his manor house, dating from the eighteenth century, is neglected, and he himself is living with his cook, a peasant woman, among the chickens, pots, dogs, dungforks, and top boots; there is the mantilla of Monsignor Waleski and the stiff shirt front of Pan Przegalski... "Rizpalidiza has in his stud an Arabian stallion like one in a Delacroix picture"... "he lost in one card game sixteen hundred weight of potatoes"... "you seem to be astonished that I have a Jew as a bailiff, he gets up at four o'clock in the morning"... "the old Baron Prek died of a stroke when he was aiming at a buck, what an end!"... and from the ballroom Jôzio Haden: "Now! and now!... keep alive!"... and the

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thud of feet executing the whirling figures of the dance; in the corridor at the entrance to the study the Jewish middleman is sleeping in a sitting position on his chair, the coachmen are drinking their vodka in the basement, a panting and sparkling girl runs out, frrrrrrr! from under the stairs and "Rosalie, help me with my shoulder strap"... something rustles in the dry leaves of the garlands in the kredensroom, mice?

The bandsmen hold their breath for a moment..... aaaaaand... when they strike up the mazurka! In the whirl of the dancing pairs the ballroom loses its rectangular shape and swells into an ellipse, but this is not enough, so to the inside and on the outside, to the inside and on the outside, but this is not enough, the lights turn round like a planetarium gone crazy, and one, two, three! and one, two, three! and "now! now! now!" and the figure dance in the round, but only once and to the middle and on the outside, and the figure, but only once, but this is not enough, so to the hall and to the hall, and to the door, and baaang! the door thrown open and the cold mist surging from the outdoors cold, and down the steps to the hoarfrosted ground of the driveway and round the house, and the house is on fire with the red lights of the windows...

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And upon the dark-blue night it dawns, a sharp line of light on the horizon, and from the distant peasant huts shine the lighted bonfires of the Ruthenian Greek Christmas like the far-away fires of Tierra del Fuego.

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THE INSULT

On the hottest day of the year I rode the mail
To Waterloo Strand and Seaside Macedon
Where, tanned like Egyptians in their Louis-Quatorze
Bath chairs, the sumptuous pleasure-loving dead
Felt no reproach, not even the tart harangue
Of the sea slapping their feet. I counted on this.

Those basking moguls thought they scented blood
When out of my deep pouch like an angler I pulled
The mail. They pressed me in a sweating circle.
Filling the air with adolescent mewings
For local news (which I had early disguised)
Of that untarnished county beyond the wave.

They soon divined the insult of my game.
I took my exit as they began to grate
Their grim vexation; but a decrepit Greek
Collared me with the force of twenty youths
(Though blind) and at my insolence sternly chewed:
This is a dream. Where is your lost beloved?

—Robert Layzer

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BELLE

BELLE had a scar on the third finger of her left hand. She was twenty-nine and unmarried—twice.

To know what she looked like, you had to ask somebody. That didn't always help though. Like, one time in the Beauty Parlor, Skeezer's little Sister said Belle was ugly, but the hair dresser said, "Aw, Belle a mighty pretty girl, Sister."

Little Sister said, "She skinny..."

"Now, I wouldn't rightly say, *skinny*'."

"...her hair's stringly..."

"Any woman's is, when it's just done."

"...she got buck teeth..."

"Ho Lord."

"...and she got right curious-looking legs!"

And the hairdresser laughed so hard at that he couldn't say anymore.

Belle didn't even know, her-own-self. Like her second husband just kept on telling her how pretty she was all the time and she wouldn't believe him; but her first husband never would say one thing or the other, and that made her mad. About her first husband, though, she never could say that he really made her mad, he just kept her puzzled. He never said much about anything at all, and then one day he just went and died, and Belle wondered why he waited so long for her when, after he finally got her, he wasn't going to say anything and was going to just die so soon after.

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Her second husband, though, was the one ran after *her*. Even when she was going after her first husband—to find out how come he was so quiet, and why he never seemed to notice her—even then her second husband chased her. And when they got married, he kept right on running: out there on the streets, popping his fingers and kicking his heels up 'til Belle got mad after a year and quit him.

Belle was always running from or after somebody. One time at the Musetta house party she ran from Skeezer all night until Pretty Willie came after her and then she started looking for Skeezer again. But he was mad at her by that time because he didn't think she should of danced with Pretty Willie in the first place.

When Pretty Willie'd come over, Skeezer told him, "You better not let your wife catch you over here fooling around."

But Pretty Willie said, "Aw, she told me I could dance with Belle."

So Belle danced with him anyway because he was a good dancer before he got married. And then he had to start carrying on.

"You better take your hand away from there," Belle told him.

"Aw, don't be like that, Belle; I don't mean no harm."

"You don't mean no good, neither."

But he just kept on so Belle had to leave him right there in the middle of the floor. And when she went back to find Skeezer, he was mad. So Belle just went over and talked to Goofer who used to be an old boy friend and still looked kind of pleased all over when Belle was around. And Skeezer got mad again.

It didn't mean anything, though. Skeezer was always trying to talk to Belle, and she always made him mad. The first time, when they were sitting in Belle's house, he just talked about everything except what was on his mind, and then finally he took her hand and looked at the tiny scar on her finger.

"What's the matter with your hand, Belle?"

"Nothing wrong with *my* hand." Belle had heard this

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beginning eleventy-five times. She pulled her hand away.

"How come can't nobody hold it?"

Belle looked at him to see what he meant by *that*. She could never tell what people meant unless she was looking at them, and even then it was hard to tell. People were tricky.

She countered with, "Cause it belongs to me. That's why."

And that finished it for a while. So Skeezer sat and played with the couch cover and couldn't think of anything else to say. Belle felt a little bit sorry, but she wasn't sure whether she was sorrier when Skeezer talked so much like he usually did or when he shut up so fast like that. She put her hand back on his and started to say something to make up, but don't you know that made him mad! He jumped right up and said, "I don't like nobody to play with me, Belle."

And then Belle got mad. She wouldn't even try to explain to him if he was going to take it like that. And since she wasn't going to try to make up, Skeezer knew he'd have to leave or something and not just stand there, so he did.

Belle could sing; God, she could sing! Every time somebody gave a finger-popping they'd ask Belle, and she'd always get up there while somebody played a home-made banjo and somebody else played a spit-and-guitar, or she'd get up there all by herself and get to patting her foot and swinging her hips, and she'd throw back her head and just sing, and every-damn-body would hush.

She liked best to talk to the instruments and have them talk back. When they really understood one another, the talking was good. And next she liked it when everybody all around would get to feeling just the way she felt. She always knew when she reached them, and she could make them feel any way she wanted to, from low-down and blue to easy and glad. And that was good because Belle always sang according to how she felt and would know that everybody was feeling the same way.

So that time at the Musetta, when Skeezer got mad at her, she made him feel glad again by singing a real soft kind of song and looking right at him. She knew he'd think she meant something special by it—which she didn't, because she

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was waiting for J. B. anyhow—but she couldn't stand for Skeezer, or anybody, to be mad at her. So she sang this song, looking straight at him, and he started in to grinning til it went almost clear around his head.

About J. B., Belle couldn't tell whether she was running after or from. Because she'd wait real hard while he was away, and then when he got back she'd be so mean he could hardly talk to her. But when he was gone she'd be sorry and start waiting all over again, thinking how sweet she'd be when he did get back and what good times they'd be having. Anyhow, she wanted him to come tonight because he could play a saxophone sweeter than *anybody* ever heard, and he'd sure be there tonight if he didn't have to work with the band in the boat.

Well, after Belle had finished this sweet song for Skeezer, he come over and took her by the right hand and grinned down at her. Belle didn't think she should start to ease him off just yet anyhow, and right then a low moaning sound came from outside through the window, and it kept going higher til it was almost like a woman screaming, and sure enough that was J. B.

This time he came in through the window, because he always had to find some kind of other way to get into anywhere. Like one time he got in upstairs somehow and came sliding down the bannister, playing his saxophone. Somebody said once they wouldn't be surprised if he sprang up—bang!—from the middle of the floor, or came—whoosh!!—down the chimney. When Belle caught herself wishing to Jesus he'd just come through the front door one time, she knew she was going to act funny again, act like she was nineteen instead of twenty-nine.

Then that old crazy J. B. came dancing across the floor, playing his saxophone all the time. Everybody made a long snakeline after him and went dancing right along behind him. Belle went outside onto the porch.

Skeezer followed close up behind her because he figured she wanted him and her to be alone for a change. Belle was a little bit glad he was there, and a little bit sad because she

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didn't want to be by herself and she didn't feel like being with anybody, either. She knew what that was, too, because nothing could make you feel like walking and like lying down, and like laughing and like crying, but the blues, and with the blues there's nothing you can do.

"Skeezer, something's got a hold of me!"

"What's the matter, Belle-baby?"

"I don't know, Skeezer. I don't know."

"How come you act so funny every time J. B. comes?"

"Something just gets hold of me, Skeezer."

"You got to make it let go, Belle."

"I can't, Skeezer."

"Can't nobody do it for you, Sugar."

"Skeezer, I can't do it."

"You can if you want to, Belle."

Then, all of a sudden, Belle could tell she was getting mad at Skeezer. Because you can't always figure people, and Skeezer was always a sure one for not being able to see what was being waved right under his nose until you didn't want him to know something. Then, he could spot it in a minute.

"Don't you be turning no church-house eyes on me, Skeezer."

"I ain't said nothing about the Bible or no Holy Ghost. I'm talking about Belinda Newcomb."

It wasn't fair for Skeezer to call her that because it went right straight back and way ahead, to before she was Belle and was Belinda, and to when she'd stop being Belle again. It had to do with the only two times it was written down, that in the Bible and in the law books, the two of them having to do with beginnings and with endings and neither of them being things that Belle could be expected to answer for. So he shouldn't have said that because right now she was Belle, and not Belinda.

Then, old J. B.'s saxophone started to wailing again, and Belle just left Skeezer right there as she went running back inside.

"Here comes old Evil Gal, her-*own*-self," said J. B. when he saw her, and made his saxophone laugh at her. "Miss

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Meanness, come on over here and sing pretty for the people."

Belle grew all hot when J. B. looked at her. He was big and red-brown from working in the river weather. He had a voice that said she was naked. She caught hold of her dress like she was going to rip it open straight down the front. Then she moved her hand along to the nape of her neck and, holding her head back, rocked it from side to side in the cradle of her palm.

J. B. started playing some low-down mooch music. Belle looked around and began to move. That old music just pulled at her all over, and then it pulled at her voice so she couldn't help but singing. But it wasn't like most times when she and the music went together, Belle was fighting that old saxophone. It said one thing to her from somewhere that was far away and still too close; then it just waited. Belle talked back, winning while she sang, but that saxophone started in again and she had to keep quiet.

And it wasn't like when she was singing to everybody because now there was nobody else in the room except her and J. B. He was leaning way out from the ankles to the groin, and way back from there on up, blowing hard on that old saxophone He had his eyes shut tight, but Belle kept feeling that he could see her just the same; she had this funny feeling again that she was inside his head.

Belle opened her mouth real wide. Instead of singing, though, she screamed. That's when she thought she'd really gone crazy because after that the only person she could see in the whole room was Skeezer, and he was looking at her like she was dead.

So Belle ran straight through that hush she'd made, right on out of the room. She remembered after, that when she got outside with that cool evening breeze on her face, she told herself the craziest thing. She'd said, "Now J. B.'s gone away." The thing about it was that she knew he was right behind her before she even turned around. He picked her up and carried her off without either one of them saying anything.

She didn't even try to tell him what was the matter with

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her, when it was over, because she knew it didn't make any sense at all, and because it wasn't the matter any more. So even when she turned over on her stomach and looked at him, she just smiled real soft, that's all, and didn't say anything.

J. B. was busy talking now. All about how it was going to be and what they were going to do. He wanted her to be with him on the boat, and they'd have a real finger-popping time every night. So he said, just like he was singing, "Come down on the river and dance with me, and sing, Belinda."

But Belle said "No."

THE WAKEFUL

The restless pass the night hours in company
forever about in the town; though many
at half past three admit to being lonely.

The wakeful perceive the small hour as merely a
digit on the clock's dial, familiar
as supper time. This is not insomnia:

(a state of disturbance marked by anxiety,
tears, veronal, prayers to the Deity,
guilt, and a plenitude of self pity).

The wakeful are simply awake and quiet
at any hour—little concerned about it;
warm in the lamp's glow, the soft bed jacket,

with cigarettes and fruit ready to hand;
a waltz whispered over the radio and
sleep hovering at the night's end.

—FRANCES PARK

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MISTER JOSEPH BOTTS

AT first Ernestine was completely overwhelmed with the wonder of the nieces and nephews. As she remembered it, she had been like a dancer, moving gracefully from one side of the stage to the other, turning her well-shaped head, as if in search, trying to decide on which of the children to kneel beside. But honestly, and it was very important to be honest now that everything had turned out as happily as a fairy story, honestly she had not known that Lucy would be the one.

Three years ago, at the Christmas family dining, one of Martha Nell's awkward little girls had twisted up her skinny face and asked, "Aunt Tina, why you be old maid?" Everyone around the table, even Lucy, had laughed as if the child were really clever.

Ernestine allowed the laughter to settle before she answered quite clearly, "I need to take care of my nieces and nephews—you're all my children." Some of the family had laughed again, but Lucy touched her arm and smiled. The candlelight caught the ugly class ring on the child's hand, the ring was wrapped with a bulge of adhesive: "Of course, Auntie," Lucy said. Ernestine touched the ring, twisting it a little so that the dirty adhesive showed more plainly. Lucy giggled and batted her eyes and whispered that the ring belonged to Mister Joseph Botts. "Not Mrs. Botts's son—at the Bakery?" Ernestine asked, and Lucy nodded and twisted her shoulders. "Nice," Ernestine said, for it was all she could do to keep from crying.

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She should have known then that Lucy was the one, but she had not known.

Ernestine Graham was willing to admit when she was wrong: Pappa always said it was a sign of wisdom. She had admitted, oh, time and again she had admitted to herself how wrong she had been about this person or that: the young men who used to call, for instance, with their weak mouths and common backgrounds; the nieces and nephews who wrote curt little notes at Easter and Memorial Day and Thanksgiving to explain their absence from the family gatherings. For a long time, just to show how mistaken a person could be, she had suspected that Martha Nell would be the other part of herself. It would have been real pleasure to possess Martha Nell, what with the child's mother glaring at everyone and insisting that she wanted to live in a house of her own. "You're welcome here, Pappa would want you here," Ernestine said. When they finally moved away, Martha Nell had leaned against her auntie and cried as if her little heart would break. Ernestine kissed the child until they were both out of breath. "Any time you're welcome," she called to the broad back of her sister-in-law; above Martha Nell's weeping her voice, kind and charming, rang so clear that even the neighbors heard.

She had known that morning, with a quiet infinite wisdom, that they would have to send Martha Nell's mother away. It had been a mistake, perhaps, for in no time at all Martha Nell was married to the little farmer up the road who smelled of the stable. Martha Nell was no better than the others: she fondled her awkward children and she missed a family dining whenever her little husband wanted to visit his folks in some god forsaken part of the state. It was all one could do to keep on being gracious and charming, for there was only Brother Albert's Lucy left, and Lucy had seemed the silliest of them all.

Six times Ernestine Graham had leaned over the cradle which her own Pappa had been rocked in. Six times she had wept helplessly at the birth of her brothers' children. Six times she had stood in front of the college chapel across the

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street, holding the new baby for its first picture, almost bursting with the joy of the moment. The pictures hung now around her mirror where she could see them every morning as she opened her eyes: Ernestine Graham dressed in ever changing styles for ever changing seasons, but ever young, stood at noon and smiled at the older waking Ernestine; the moments of the pictures crowded around her to bless the day, and she could hear Brother Albert and Brother Ed, their voices younger, speaking to her, "Smile," they said, and "Good, that's really good." After the picture-making she had led the way into the house for dinner, where Albert and Ed fought over who should seat her. They always had to wait the blessing for the sisters-in-law; the women would come red-faced and apologetic, pulling at their slip straps and smoothing back their dung-colored hair. After Pappa passed away, Ernestine herself, at the head of the table, smiled at the awkward women just as Pappa had smiled. "We wouldn't dream of going on without you," she always said, lifting a silver dish cover to make sure the food was not cold yet.

But even in the moments of triumph—when the boys quarrelled with their stupid wives, or when they came to borrow money, looking away from her eyes as if they were angry that Pappa had loved her best of all, even then, she had felt her throat contract with the hard breathing of the chase. Almost mystically she had known that some day she would grasp the other part of herself which, even in triumph, ran like a rabbit from the hound.

After the Christmas of the bandaged ring, after they'd sent Martha Nell's mother away and Ed had come back home to live, Ernestine Graham made arrangements to buy the Whalen place for Brother Albert. Ernestine Graham was fair; even the tradesmen said to her very face, "You're fair and square, and that's a fact." But she was tired. It was like—it was as if she raced to read ahead to see how the story ended—that was exactly what it was like. She had sent Albert and his tribe packing, trying to see the end of the story. She called to them, "You're welcome any time,"

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but she was so relieved when she closed the door after them she could have lain down on the parquet floor. She did not even think about the ring on Lucy's finger.

For the first time in three generations the Graham house was quiet. Only Brother Ed, no trouble to anybody, poor thing, moved with her through the quietness—he was clumsy sometimes against the furniture or the stair rail, weak with the drink in him, his breath smelling up the place, but he was beautifully quiet and Ernestine was grateful, for she was very tired. Even the family dinners were a drain on her, but nobody bothered to sense it, of course. The candlelight shone on the faces around the table and the faces moved as if under water; she was cold and afraid because a person couldn't really see ahead to know how a story would turn out; somebody kept adding more pages to the book: Lucy kept adding more pages.

Ernestine tried not to look at the child's face. She tried to tell herself she had lost all of them and it didn't matter. But Lucy seemed to shout, "Catch me. Kneel beside me, Aunt Tina." Ernestine did not mean to allow her eyes to creep toward the girl, but the life in Lucy shimmered, like heat on the horizon; she moved her hands and her body, catching the light of attention; one could not look away for long.

Lucy said, "Yesterday at the Easter service, I had the most beautiful compliment, Alec said I looked like you." Lucy said, "I could die over missing the Memorial Day dinner, I hadn't realized, I could die." Lucy said, "Sweetheart, let me look at you, how stunning you are," and Joseph Botts was followed by somebody named Brian, then twins from Virginia, and worst of all, the Tom something who came for Thanksgiving dinner and admired himself in the pier glass mirror. The bandaged ring was replaced by a silver basketball, a fraternity pin, and then another ring, diamond this time.

Then no ring shone. Suddenly no ring shone.

It was Christmas again. As usual one of them said they all had a lot to be thankful for, and somebody spoke of war,

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and Albert said he was grateful to have all his folks in the good old U. S. A. He said it was a mighty sad time for people like Mrs. Botts. Albert's wife, her mouth full, turned to her daughter. "Joseph's picture's in the morning paper, Lucy. They brought his body home to bury—clear across the ocean." Albert's wife said, "Lucy was kind of sweet on him once."

Ernestine watched Lucy's face carefully. "Yes, I saw the picture," Lucy said. "He was an awfully nice boy." The maid passed the escalloped oysters; Ed tried to serve himself and Lucy lifted her young hands to steady the silver casserole. Lucy's hands were naked. Ernestine felt her own face move, as it had not moved since the little farmer took Martha Nell away, almost as if she were going to cry. "Mister Albert is ready for a beaten biscuit," she said to the maid, and her voice was breathless. Lucy lowered her eyes to the dish. "Coffee for Miss Martha Nell," Ernestine said, and she wanted to shout to all of them, "Quit dawdling. Can't you see what's going to happen?"

"It's not as if you were still going with Joe Botts, or anything, is it?" Martha Nell asked.

Lucy shook her head. Albert's wife said, "She's been looking peaked for a couple of days. I figure it's that Tom." Albert's wife laughed, and the food in her mouth was like dough.

"Do you remember the time when Pappa took us all to the State Fair?" Ernestine began. She could tell the story without thinking and Albert would interrupt when she got to the part about the ferris wheel. She turned her well-shaped head from one side of the table to the other, and Lucy smiled.

After dinner was over (Lucy's stupid mother was enough to drive a person crazy; she kept picking at the candy pudding when everyone else was through), Ernestine led the way into the parlor. Beside her was Lucy. "I want to talk to you," Lucy whispered, and Ernestine pretended not to hear, for she could not speak above the joy in her throat. "I'll wait upstairs. I want to talk to you," Lucy said.

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Ernestine knew the child would be in the blue room, but she opened the other bedroom doors first, stopping to look at the pictures around her own mirror—the picture with Lucy was the loveliest of them all, she should have known that Lucy was the one. The girl lay on the bed where she had slept when they all lived together. The other Lucy lay on the bed. Ernestine frowned: it was difficult to separate the child crying in the blue room from the child in the picture but Lucy was one person. "Lucy, Lucy, Lucy," Ernestine sang, and the child was in her arms. "Child, child," Ernestine whispered and after a while the crying stopped.

Ernestine moistened her lips with her tongue. She spoke softly, "I remember the first time you showed me his ring. It was a dining, just like today. The ring was too big and the candlelight..."

"No, Aunt Tina, not Joseph Botts." The girl moved her mouth against Ernestine's shoulder. Ernestine trembled, for she felt the words more than she heard them. "Tom, Aunt Tina, Tom. He asked me for his ring. I don't think I can stand it."

"Surely, sweet. Sweet, Lucy." Ernestine began to rock, back and forth, swaying the child and her words in the blue room which needed airing. "Yes, yes," she said, hardly hearing the little details of the story about Tom and a sorority sister, and the letter which somebody wrote somebody. "We're not given more than we can bear, honey," Ernestine said, and she thought of the dead soldier and his large hand which once wore a high school class ring. Perhaps, even then, she thought passionately of Mister Joseph Botts. "Yes, Lucy, baby, yes."

"And downstairs, all the family—it's so humiliating." Lucy cleared her throat in the quiet room. They're bound to start asking questions."

Ernestine stopped rocking. She pressed her fingers against the child's soft shoulders. "Look at me."

The tears had washed Lucy's eyes bright. "I'm listening, Aunt Tina." She was no older than her first picture.

"We'll go down together, that's what we'll do. We'll

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work it out, Lucy, you and I. It's going to be all right. You're my girl, Lucy."

The child held up her face to be kissed. She said, "You're good, Aunt Tina. You're so good to all of us."

"No, Lucy, it's not goodness," Ernestine said, just as she had always said to Pappa. She closed her eyes. At the last, Pappa's smile was twisted by paralysis. "You're my flesh and blood," Ernestine said again, and she wished she would never have to turn the page of the moment.

Holding the child's hand Ernestine told them all: "Lucy's given Tom back his ring. She decided he wasn't good enough to marry a Graham."

"What's this?" Albert said, and Albert's wife, wallowing in Pappa's chair, began, "Now, Lucy, I've told you..."

"Lucy has been very brave," Ernestine said. "You're not to bother her with a lot of foolish questions. This is important."

"Well, honestly, I'm sure," Albert's wife said.

"We'll have more coffee now. Martha Nell, please pass the napkins." Ernestine felt the hard pressure of Lucy's young hand. She wished the hand wore a dead ring to bite into their flesh.

But there was no need of a token between them. Lucy herself said, "I'll see you tomorrow. I'll drop in tomorrow morning." It was always Lucy who made the arrangements for their meeting, right to the last. "I'll see you tomorrow," Lucy said. Nobody could say that Ernestine had pursued the child.

Tom and the sorority sister (Ernestine could never remember her name) were married on the day after college reopened. Snow covered the earth, "We'll go up to my room," Ernestine said when she saw Lucy's face. "Ed's not feeling so well this afternoon." The child did not answer, and Ernestine said, "We'll have tea in my room. It will be cozy against the snow."

Lucy sat in the flowered chintz chair by the west window. She said, "The cookies are good. Did you get them at

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Mrs. Botts's?" She said, "Thank you, no more." Then, suddenly, she said, "Talk to me, Aunt Tina. Please, talk."

"Of course, sweet." Ernestine moved her rocker so that the child's head was framed by the window. "Let me see... Did I ever tell you about the time..." It was important to tell the stories well, of Pappa's being elected mayor, and Ed's eighty yard run against Louisville, and the celebration when Albert came home from his war. Even if Lucy were not listening she would remember the stories with pride, as sleepers on winter nights remember the words whispered by lovers.

"Really, I've never heard that part," Lucy said as if she were listening. The sky behind her head was lemon and mauve and gray. The college chapel across the street slipped slowly from its squareness

"Tom got married this morning." Lucy did not move her head. Ernestine was conscious of the presence of color behind the paper-thin chapel, but she could not name the color. "Aunt Tina, did anything like this happen to you?"

"Lucy, dear." Ernestine rose, gracefully without touching her hands to the arms of the chair, and moved around the room; she lowered the blinds, blotting out the memory of color in the south, and the presence of color behind tree branches and the college buildings. "There were always young men around the house," she said slowly; then, with a rush of words, "Pappa and Albert and Ed—they were always so careful."

To Martha Nell she would have said, "No, nothing like this ever happened to me." She would have told Martha Nell that she hadn't minded at all when the unworthy young men left the house and climbed into their fancy buggies, never to come back. A girl didn't have to be in love, just to *be* was enough, Ernestine always said, and the boys and Pappa had complimented her on her good sense. "The house was always exciting, full of company; and, then later, it was good to take care of Pappa." Ernestine's hands trembled as she turned the buttons of the vanity lamps, for Pappa had loved her best of all.

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But Martha Nell had never said, "Please tell me, Aunt Tina, did somebody like Tom happen to you?" Martha Nell had never called for help. "Please." Lucy tramped the word in the snow, for Lucy needed to hear of pain. "Help me," Lucy called.

"I've never mentioned it to anyone before." Ernestine closed her eyes. "There was somebody. Don't ask me his name."

"Was it like Tom, Aunt Tina?"

Ernestine heard the child move as brightly as fire in the dark room.

She was in the dream; it was her turn to recite, but she could not remember a single word of the reading; backstage the elocution teacher had lost the book and the audience moved restlessly and one man rose to go. Ernestine Graham ran back and forth in her mind like a dancer; she could no more see the faces of the young men who wore stiff collars and flowing ties than she could outline the face of an idea, like love or even death. "He wore a stiff collar and a flowing tie," she said. She could see only Pappa's face, a young Pappa on the horse they had shown at the State Fair.

Ernestine described Pappa's face against her closed eyelids, for the child stood beside her and her young breath was warm. "He was tall and thin. His hair was black and soft and curled," she said, and she opened her eyes. Tears stood in Lucy's eyes. "His hands were especially beautiful.

"He was taken away, and I loved him." Ernestine spoke very softly, praying that Lucy would not hear the words if they were wrong.

This time she had remembered the recital piece and she had spoken beautifully, for there was the sound of applause and the man who had started to leave called, "Huzzah," and stood in tribute. Lucy pressed her face against Ernestine and called her name.

In the triumph Ernestine dared to say, "I loved him, Lucy—the way you loved Joseph Botts."

The color of the world outside pressed against the closed blinds. Ernestine Graham fingered the top button of her

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blouse. The man who called "Huzzah" wore the dotted newspaper face of Joseph Botts whose body had been flown across the ocean.

"Whatever do you mean?" Lucy drew back, but the kaleidoscope with its colored fragments of the dream did not move, and the plane mirrors still reflected the image of Joseph Botts.

"That day, downstairs, at the dining table, you said... you said, 'This ring belongs to Mister Joseph Botts.' Your eyes were very bright, and you were happier than I've ever seen you, Lucy, honestly you were."

"Aunt Tina. That was such a long time ago."

"Three years, only three years, Lucy. As sure as faith I knew Joseph Botts was the one. I knew it, Lucy." Ernestine placed her hands on the child's arm, for beneath Lucy's voice and behind her face lay laughter. Ernestine held tightly. It was very important to heap words and bury the laughter which tried to rise even in her own throat. "I said to you that day, 'Nice,' I said, and it was all I could do to keep from crying, because I knew he was the one. But he was taken away, Lucy. And your Tom knew. Tom knew you never really loved him, not the way you did Joseph."

"Aunt Ernestine, you're hurting me, you're hurting my arm."

"You can get over losing a boy to somebody else—that isn't losing. But you can't get over really losing a boy, to death—I mean, the way we've lost. You don't lose a person when he goes on living. But when he's dead..." Ernestine let loose of the child's arm, as if she threw down a book or a shovel or even her own body after a race. She breathed heavily, but she was able to say, "You've been crying, for a month you've been crying for Joseph Botts."

The child's eyes were wide, her mouth was open. Her small fingers lifted to her mouth, as if to feel Ernestine's words on her own lips.

"I'm mixed up," Lucy said. "I'm all mixed up. I don't know anything."

"Baby sweet, you're trembling. You're my girl. We'll

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have fresh tea. We'll talk about Joseph together. We're together. We have each other, don't we, Lucy?"

The child lifted her wet face to Ernestine and the child almost smiled. Outside the bedroom door Ed stumbled in the hall, but the house was quiet.

Ernestine kneeled beside the child's chair. "Sweet, sweet."

"Joe...that's what I really called him." Lucy spoke as if she too moved in the dream. "And we really did have a lot of fun together, Joe and I. I hadn't remembered. We had so much fun."

"Tell me. Tell me, Lucy."

Lucy lifted her head quickly. Her eyes were afraid. "Wouldn't it be awful if he was the one?"

"We're not given more than we can bear, honey."

"I'm scared, Aunt Tina."

Ernestine's body ached with kneeling, but she did not move to touch the child.

"I didn't even bother to go to his funeral. And all this time..."

"We'll make it up, some way, honey. We'll take flowers, that's what we'll do." Lucy began to move her head from side to side, as if she searched for a hiding place, and Ernestine had to sharpen her voice to pierce the girl's consciousness. "What flowers did he like? What flowers did he like best, Lucy?"

"He always made jokes, and he laughed a lot."

"My young man liked roses," Ernestine recalled. "Red roses, he liked, Lucy, did Joseph Botts like red roses?"

"I'm trying to remember. Can't you see I'm trying to remember?"

"The picture in the paper—he looked like the kind of a boy who would admire roses."

"Maybe he did, maybe. I'm almost sure."

"Red roses?"

"I'm almost sure." Lucy pressed her hands against her temples. She seemed to be looking past the room. "There was a song." Lucy began to hum, but her song held no more

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melody than the car which passed on the street beyond the blinds. "He couldn't sing very well, but I'm sure it was about roses. I think it was." She hummed again, and no car passed. "I can't remember."

"We'll take roses, Lucy, that's what we'll do."

"He was crazy about Betty Grable. I know that for sure. We went to see one of her pictures two different times." The words dropped from Lucy's mouth slowly, as if they were pebbles dropped into the water of a dream. "And he liked red. He liked a red dress of mine."

"My young man favored red, too. It's almost funny, isn't it?"

"The second time we went to that show, he called real late. I slipped out and I wore the dress. I guess it was awful to slip out that way."

"It wasn't awful at all." Ernestine laughed as she thrust the pebbles quickly into the pocket of her mind before they ever touched the water. "Pappa and the boys would have skinned me alive, but it wasn't awful at all."

"And he liked to dance."

"Really, Lucy. It's too much of a coincidence, really. I know he was graceful, too, wasn't he?"

But Lucy did not go on to remember dancing. Suddenly, the child's face crumpled like a sponge, and Ernestine rose, as if from prayer, to call comfort into the room with, "There, there," and "Lucy, Lucy," knowing she had found the other part of herself. "Things work out, child. All things work together for good."

It was no time before the child was saying, "Do you know what I'm thinking about?"

"Yes, yes." Ernestine looked steadily at the girl's face, allowing her eyes to rest on the lines which would deepen, the mole, the faint moustache. She wished Lucy would say, "We're the same age, aren't we, Aunt Tina? Exactly the same age!" She had thought for a moment that the child was going to take the words out of her mind.

Lucy said, "Joe must be somewhere watching us."

"Of course he is, of course." Ernestine turned the child in

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a half circle toward the bed. She did not want the child to be frightened. Joseph Botts stood beside the vanity dresser which would hold the first jonquils, pale and handsome as winter sunlight.

"I feel better. I always feel better with you," Lucy said. "We must get out more, you and I. We'll go to the movies together, and tomorrow and the next day and the next—we'll do all sorts of pleasant things."

"We will hurry before the magic breaks," Ernestine said to herself. She was sure she had spoken to herself, for the child did not turn to the vanity dresser. Despite her charm, Lucy was the silliest of them all.

Perhaps, if they had gone straight to Mrs. Botts's rooms over the bakery, Lucy would have waited a little longer to lose the good part of herself. But Ernestine had not really expected her to last longer than spring, and a few days, one way or the other, didn't really matter. It was Pappa's phrase: "A few days, one way or the other." At the last he had said it, and he tried to smile, right at the very last, ever so grateful to her for easing his misery.

She had sensed the end in the beginning, but with Lucy she did not hurry the end. A quiet pleasure promenaded through the waiting. Mister Joseph Botts grew in favor and in stature. He smiled in the church and the post office and the book store and the college auditorium. Ernestine Graham, lying on her bed, smiled at the first jonquils on the vanity dresser. The whole world was decorated with the youth and love of Joseph Botts.

Ernestine had told Lucy so, the last day. "The whole town seems to have been redecorated—seeing it as you and Joseph saw it, I mean." Lucy had reached across the carved wood of the Sweet Shoppe table and touched her hand. It was a Judas kiss, of course, for in the very next breath she told of Nat somebody and his invitation to a dance. "I'm going. I'm going with him, Aunt Ernestine. It's all right, isn't it?"

Ernestine looked down at the table with its crude hearts and arrows and waving initials. She was quite sure she could

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find her own initials if she cared to look. She was not angry. She had planned with the utmost care not to be angry.

She said, she only said, "I've been promising Mrs. Botts we would call on her. If you are willing, of course."

But it was too late for the visit to do any good. Lucy looked angry, her eyes big and stupid, as if she would be glad to shoot a bullet into the heart of Joseph Botts. Lucy would have murdered Pappa, even if he hadn't been sick. Lucy would have enjoyed handing him the extra tablets to make him sleep into eternity. Lucy's confused anger was almost amusing.

Mrs. Botts, gray with flour, hovered over Lucy, handing her letters and snapshots and asking if she were quite comfortable, but it was all too late. At least the child had the decency to contain herself until they were back in Ernestine's room. One should be thankful for the child's veneer of refinement, one should not even bother to remember the child's loud voice, or her flaming cheeks. "That was awful. It was just awful to go there," she shouted as soon as they were home. "I don't ever want to go again, not ever."

"Mrs. Botts is Joseph's mother." Ernestine's voice was beautifully calm.

"I don't care. You can't keep on going around with dead people. You just can't."

"You've been talking to your mother, haven't you, Lucy? I thought you decided Joseph was to be our secret."

The child looked positively absurd, backing her way out of the bedroom, feeling her away against the wall, like a criminal, almost a murderer, slowly moving to the stairway, ready to turn and run as soon as her thin little hands reached the stair-rail. "My mother said taking the roses was all right, she guessed, but..."

"What else did your mother say?"

"I don't remember. Honestly, I don't. Aunt Tina! It's not I don't appreciate all you've done for me."

"Today is the day for the roses, Lucy. Today is the day."

"You're mad at me, aren't you? About going to the dance

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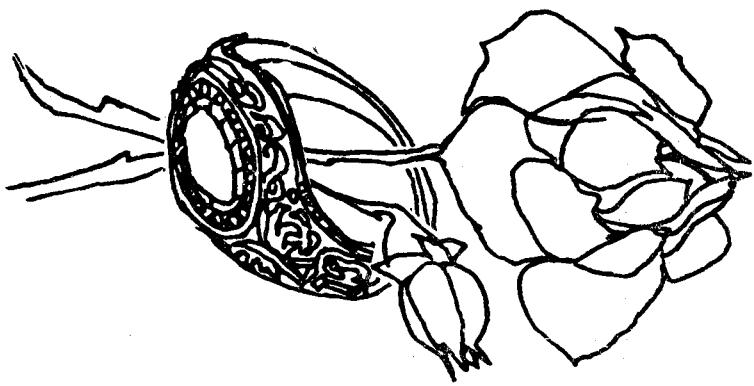
with Nat, that's it, isn't it? But don't be mad. I just don't want to go to the cemetery any more."

"I've never told a soul about the roses. I've kept our secret, Lucy."

"You can have Joseph all by yourself."

Actually, the child said, "You can have Joseph all by yourself." Before she turned and raced down the stairway, she said the words, as if Joseph were hers to give. The stair-rail, running under Ernestine's fingers was as smooth as silk, lifting her up, almost as if she flew to the door to call after Lucy. "Come back soon. You're welcome. Any time," she called with genuine cordiality. One could only pity the child. It was almost embarrassing to look at her thin little figure, knowing one had taken Lucy away from Lucy: the child's glittering youth had come off like a cloak in one's hands. It was sad for the child to be left with only the silly part of herself.

Ernestine brushed past Ed in the upstairs hall, and closed the door of her room. She unfastened her blouse quickly, tearing the top button in her haste. She did not bother to lift her eyes to make sure Mister Joseph Botts, no longer wearing either his stiff collar or his flowing tie, waited for her.



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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Fiction

VILMA HOWARD *(Belle)* was born in Alabama and at an early age moved to New York City. She graduated from Fisk University, won a scholarship to the Mexico City College Writer's Center, and then came to Paris where she has been living and writing for several years. Her poem, *After the War*, appeared in the fourth issue of THE PARIS REVIEW. *Belle*, Miss Howard's first published fiction, is a selection from a work in progress entitled *A Book of Fancies*.

WILL MORGAN *(Letters from Indiana)* was born in Alabama and attended Harvard College where he studied with Archibald MacLeish. His poem, *The Crucifixion*, was printed in THE PARIS REVIEW, and he has also contributed to *New Poems* and *New Story*. He is at present writing in New York.

JOHN PHILLIPS *(The Engines of Hygeia)* is the author of *The Second Happiest Day*, a best-selling novel of 1953. He is now at work on a new novel in New York. *The Engines of Hygeia* is his first published short story.

HOLLIS SUMMERS *(Mister Joseph Botts)* was born in 1916 in Eminence, Kentucky. He received his Ph.D degree from the State University of Iowa in 1949 and since then has taught at the University of Kentucky. The author of two novels, *City Limit* and *Brighten the Corner*, Mr. Summers toured 33 American colleges and universities in 1952, making a study of their courses in writing under the auspices of the Ford Fund for the Advancement of Education.

Chronicle

ZYGMUNT HAUPT *(Tierra Del Fuego)* was born in Eastern Poland in 1907. He served as an artillery officer in the Polish Army from 1939 to 1946, and afterwards started writing in English. His stories have appeared in *Accent*, *Furioso*, and *Perspectives*, as well as in THE PARIS REVIEW which published his story entitled *In Paris and Arcadia*.

Interview

ALFRED CHESTER is a young American writer living in Paris. His novel, *Jamie Is My Heart's Desire*, is being published in French this spring by *Editions du Seuil*. His published work includes two long stories in *Botteghe Oscure* and the story *Here Be Dragons* printed in the fourth number of THE PARIS REVIEW.

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VILMA HOWARD is the author of the story *Belle* which appears in this issue.

Poetry

GEORGE P. ELLIOTT *(Of God)* teaches English at St. Mary's College, California. In 1954 he was awarded a Ford Foundation Fellowship. His stories and poems have appeared in magazines in both the United States and Britain.

GEOFFREY HILL *(Pennies for Charon, An Enemy of the People)*, whose work has appeared in *The London Magazine* and has been broadcast over the BBC, was recently appointed to the faculty of the University of Leeds. He is 22 years old.

JOSEPH LANGLAND *(The Cobra)* is an Assistant Professor of English at the University of Wyoming. He has contributed to *The New Yorker, Poetry, Accent,* and other magazines.

ROBERT LAYZER *(The Insult)* is a student at the Harvard Medical School. His poem *Brownstone* appeared in the third issue of THE PARIS REVIEW.

FRANCES PARK *(The Wakeful)* published her first novel, *This Day's Rapture,* in 1933. It was followed by *Walls Against the Wind,* published by Houghton Mifflin in 1935. Her work has appeared in *The New Yorker* and other magazines.

LOUIS SIMPSON *(The Battle)* is an associate editor of the Bobbs Merrill Publishing Company and instructor in English at Columbia. His poetry has appeared in *The Hudson Review, Partisan Review, The American Scholar, New Poems by American Poets* (a Ballantine Book) and elsewhere.

Illustrations

OLIVER HARRINGTON *(The Engines of Hygeia)* is an American artist and illustrator living in Paris. He worked as a cartoonist for the *Pittsburg Courier* for five years, and has illustrated books for the Viking Press and other publishers.

FRANKLYN WEBBER *(Belle)* studied at the Pratt Institute and has now come to Paris on a Wooley Scholarship Grant to study graphic art techniques.

FRANCIS WILMETTE *(Mister Joseph Botts)* spends part of the year in Paris and part in New York, where he has designed posters, book jackets, and illustrations.

ENNIO PETTENELLO *(cover drawing)* is a distinguished Italian sculptor who divides his time between Rome and Paris, where he serves as consultant to a group of international architects. Some of his bronzes are at the Musee de l'Art Moderne in Paris.

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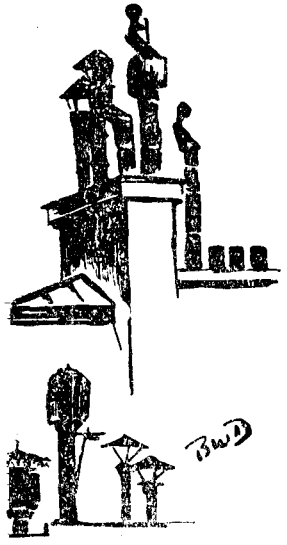

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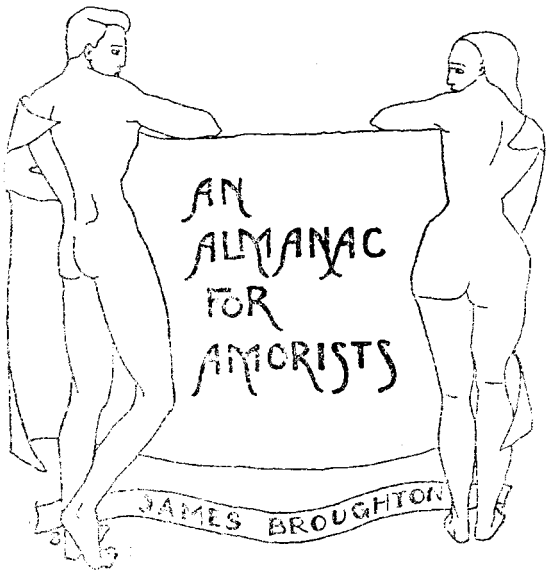

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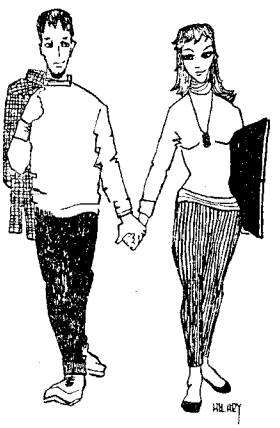

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